

AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER E. GOLDTHWAIT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: OK, this is Tape 1, Side 1, with Christopher E. Goldthwait. G-O-L-D-T-H-W-A-I-T. You go by Chris?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: Your E, what does it stand for?

GOLDTHWAIT: The E is for Edgar.

Q: OK, let's begin with tell me when you were born.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, I was born on June 11, 1949 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Q: Let's talk about first on your father's side what do you know about the Goldthwait's and where do they come from and all?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, in this country the family originated in New England and came to the U.S. in about 1630 and settled initially in Salem and stayed in the New England area except for a branch that went south in the mid-19th century. My direct ancestors stayed in New England until my grandfather was born. He then began to relocate following job opportunities. Going back further the family probably originates in Yorkshire but there are no Goldthwait's left in England anymore aside for one or two who immigrated back to the UK after several generations here in this country.

Q: Well let's go back to grandpa, great grandfather. What were they involved in?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, great grandfather was mainly involved in farming in the western part of Massachusetts. My grandfather was a textile chemist and he worked for a number of private firms as a research chemist and eventually for the Department of Agriculture for Southern Regional Research lab.

Q: Where did he...did he go to college then?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, he went to the Worcester Institute of Technology.

Q: How about your father? What was he doing?

GOLDTHWAIT: He was a college professor; he's still living. He taught mainly philosophy and at some period during his career he was also an administrator at the university, a dean for several years.

Q: Where did he go to college?

GOLDTHWAIT: He went to Oglethorpe University, which is where my mother also attended and that's where they met.

Q: I'm assuming it's a Georgia school?

GOLDTHWAIT: It is, in Atlanta.

Q: Where has he taught?

GOLDTHWAIT: He taught at Oglethorpe for a brief period of time. He then taught at the California State College in Sacramento, he taught at the University of California at Davis and then we moved back east and spent about twenty years, the main part of his career, at the State University of New York in Plattsburg, New York.

Q: Let's go to your mother's side. What do you know about your mother's side?

GOLDTHWAIT: I know less family history about my mother's side. Someone wrote a Goldthwait genealogy, which is why I know more about that side of the family. My mother's maiden name was Benefield. Her father, my grandfather, was an electrician and I think his family probably came over in the early 19th century. His wife, my grandmother, was a Powell before she married, she was from Virginia and my grandfather was from North Carolina in the hill country near Virginia. They lived a number of places as he was sort of finding his way into electricity. He worked for the railroads initially in 1910, 1920, when they were...and he actually worked with the gaslights. But eventually as electricity came in he became an electrician, moved to Atlanta and spent most of his career working for Fulton County as an electrician and eventually an electrical inspector in the Atlanta region.

Q: Well now you were born in 1949 in Atlanta, how long did you live in Atlanta?

GOLDTHWAIT: Only a year or two. I think probably about a year and maybe a little longer. Then I moved to Chicago when my dad was in graduate school and he got his PhD. at Northwestern and from there in 1952 we eventually went out to the Sacramento, California area.

Q: Was there any place as a small boy that you spent some time in Sacramento?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well actually I sort of grew up mainly in Davis, California, and Plattsburg in upstate New York. We lived in Davis for about seven years and then just as I was entering high school we moved back to New York State. My family was there really up until about 1985 although I was only living there until I went off to college.

Q: OK, let's talk about Davis, California. This is I assume is a place where you sort of began school and all. What was Davis like when you were there? This would be in the '50s.

GOLDTHWAIT: This would be...we lived there from 1957 and stayed until '64 except for one year when my dad was on sabbatical and we were living in Germany. Davis was a small town, 10-12,000 people when we moved there. The university I think in those days had about four to five thousand students so nothing like what it is today. It was in the middle of the agricultural country, still is although all of the urban areas have expanded into what was agriculture land. It was a very friendly small community. People got around mainly by bicycling as opposed to cars. Some people used cars but people that were associated with the university tended to use bicycles. So it was a very small community and in those days everybody pretty much knew everybody and now it's about 40-50 thousand people strong.

Q: Well as a kid did you get out into the agricultural fields and see the blades?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, we had a big tomato field right behind our house. So one of the things we did when I was eight or nine years old in the growing season was go out after the workers had pretty much picked for the day and we would have tomato fights. It was just an obvious thing.

Q: I was just going to ask about that. I used to have orange fights. I remember in San Marino in the '30s and the orange groves there.

GOLDTHWAIT: We would make these little walls out of the big clods of dry earth because it's a fairly dry climate there and then we would hide behind those and throw tomatoes at each other.

Q: In the family...do you have brothers or sisters?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I'm an only child.

Q: Well how did it work in the family? Did you have a chance at all to get together for meals and sit around and talk about things? How did this work?

GOLDTHWAIT? Yes, we were generally quite good about always sitting down having dinner together and everybody would relate the adventures of their day. My father, my mother, myself and that was something that was pretty important. I can remember when I got into high school I'd want to go out and eat junk food for dinner with my friends. My mother just was quite offended by that and I didn't get to do that very often.

Q: Well then were you much of a reader?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, very much so and still am although I don't have as much time for it as I would like, none of us do I guess.

Q: Well as a kid, do you recall the sort of books that influenced you or just were fun to read or anything?

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh, when I was very young like in grade school I read all of the Dr. Dolittle books.

Q: Hugh Lofting wrote those.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, and let's see, later I really got interested in literature and started reading classics, if you will, in junior high school. I remember in high school I was reading Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and all the Russian writers and a good number of the books by the English writers as well. I actually liked the Russians best.

Q: What was your school like as an elementary school in Davis?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was a single floor with rows of classrooms, outdoor corridors but with awnings. The thing that I remember is that it was very lean and mean; there were only a couple administrators and two or three other employees that were not actually teachers in contrast to the schools today where you have as many non-teachers as you have teachers, if not more. The level of instruction was very good. It was a college town and the parents were deeply interested in their children's education. The quality of the education reflected that.

Q: What was the student body like?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the town had four or five elementary schools at that point. I would think there were probably, oh, maybe only two to three hundred students in each one. There was a centralized junior high school and a centralized high school for the entire town and they probably also had two to three hundred students each.

Q: Was it mainly Anglo or were there other groups there or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was largely Anglo; there were a few students sons and daughters of faculty at the university who came from other countries, many other countries, some Europeans, some south Asians, a few from Japan. There was a small group of minorities, there was a handful of black students at school. There were a handful of students of Latin American, Mexican origin; their parents had come up to work on some of the farms around the community.

Q: Was there sort of a Mexican town felt there?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not that I can remember. Most of the Mexicans lived out on various farms where their parents were employed. I don't recall any of them living in town. There were a couple of streets in the community where most of the black families lived.

Q: What grade were you in when you went to Plattsburgh?

GOLDTHWAIT: I was beginning ninth grade. Excuse me, the beginning of the tenth grade, sorry.

Q: Were there any...for example were there any courses, when you went to junior high, were there any courses that really you enjoyed more than you didn't enjoy?

GOLDTHWAIT: I suppose what I enjoyed most were geography and probably history.

Q: Well now did the outside world intrude much? As a kid were you aware of things happening?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes. In the school we kept up with foreign events, at home we subscribed not only the local paper but to the San Francisco Chronicle which had a fair degree of international coverage and then during one year when I was about twelve or thirteen we went overseas.

Q: Where did you go?

GOLDTHWAIT: To Germany, to Munich.

Q: In German?

GOLDTHWAIT: Muenchen.

Q: How did you find Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh I loved it and that I would guess as much as anything it probably made me want to think about foreign service as a potential career.

Q: Did you sort of get out and around there?

GOLDTHWAIT: We did. We visited Paris a couple times because I have cousins who were living in Paris at the time. We took a couple of trips to Northern Italy basically seeking weather that was a little warmer than the fall and winter in Germany. Then at the end of our stay we spent six or seven weeks doing a driving tour of quite a lot of Europe, down one side of Italy and up the other, through France into the low countries, up to Denmark and eventually Norway where my parents had friends from college days and back and then across to England and spent about a week in London and driving around southern England.

Q: That would give you quite a bit of...what was your school like in Germany, an American military school?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I went to a German language school. We went and met with the local education department and asked what kind of school would be the best so that I could begin to acquire some German. They recommended a private school that was about half an hour by bus outside of the city and I ended up going there. It was called the Lehrinstitute Ackermann, Herr Ackermann being the headmaster.

Q: How did you find the sort of educational method and the school?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the educational method was one of strict discipline; a lot of rote learning in contrast to what I would recall from back in the U.S., more memorization and drilling of grammar and things like that. But it was effective and the main thing I wanted to get out of it was a degree of fluency in German. Actually I was in the school only for about six months but by the time I left I was fluent. It was what you would call "Kinder Deutsch" (children's German) and not refined or highly grammatical but I could say anything I wanted to.

Q: Well then let's see you were there...when were you there in Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was 1962 to early 1963.

Q: Where did your family stand politically or did they?

GOLDTHWAIT: My mother was a southern Democrat who became a more liberal Democrat. My father came from a more conservative Republican background although he himself was fairly liberal and has become increasingly so over time. I actually consider myself to be a fairly liberal democrat and today he makes me look like a conservative.

Q: How about religion? Was there a family religion or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: There was. My mother's side of the family was Episcopalian and that probably came from her mother. That was how I was raised. We went through various periods of time when we either did or did not attend church. I can remember actually going to church with neighbors for a couple of years because my own parents were not attending church. When we moved to Davis they became a part of the local Episcopal Church and we attended church until the time we went to Germany. When we got to New York State it just sort of petered out although in recent years I've started attending church again. I resumed attending church in Chad, largely because most of the American presence in the country were missionaries and it's was good way to keep in touch with them. But I guess it stuck.

Q: Well then let's talk about Plattsburgh. You were there from when to when?

GOLDTHWAIT: In the summer of 1964 and I stayed there through the upper years of high school and then I went away to start college at American University in the Washington area here.

Q: How did you find switching from basically the California system to the New York system?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was an adjustment. The school in Plattsburgh was not of the same quality, not as well equipped although they did build a new high school which I went into in my second or third year there, I forget which, which was a better facility. There were not as many electives; the range of classes to choose from was smaller than it would have been at Davis. In Junior High School in Davis we were already starting to take electives. In New York at that point of time the only real electives were foreign languages, although they did start a couple of art courses and some other things while I was there.

I didn't like the move initially, it was a difficult time to you know...

Q: A very difficult time, mid-teens.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah, a difficult time to move. It took some years before I really began to enjoy upstate New York. Now I'm quite fond of it.

Q: I wonder both at Davis and in Plattsburgh were there any courses in high school or activities that you particularly enjoyed?

GOLDTHWAIT: I very much enjoyed foreign languages. In Davis I took an additional year of German and French and then in Plattsburgh I took French. I also very much enjoyed an art history course that I took the first year it was offered in Plattsburgh.

Q: Did you find the school system in New York...they have the regents' exams and all. Were things sort of predicated on that would you say?

GOLDTHWAIT: Very much so I would say that about twenty percent of classroom time was spent either preparing for or taking the regents' exams and what they call the ten-weeks tests, which were intermediate stages given every ten weeks. That was one of the things that I thought was the failing of the system; it was much more oriented toward passing tests as opposed to real comprehension of what you were studying. In retrospect I'd say it taught me one skill that was useful later in my career: the ability to cram for meetings with briefing papers, and then selectively forget the details once the event was over.

Q: Did you have...did you have any extra curricular activities that you found yourself engaged in?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not too much. I did work on the high school yearbook for a couple of years. I never did anything with sports other than a little bit of casual tennis, a little bit of bowling and I regret now that I did not start with some sports when I was a real kid and continue through with something or other. I thought I sort of missed out on that.

Q: How about reading or outside reading and all? Did you find yourself reading different fields or anything?

GOLDTHWAIT: I did quite a lot of reading particularly when I got to Plattsburgh. I didn't have a lot of friends the first year or two until I had a chance to kind of become part of the school community. I would go home and read each afternoon after school and I would read two or three hours before dinner and I would read...did my homework and then maybe read another hour in the evening. Earlier I had watched a lot of TV but I think by high school I lost interest in that and was doing more reading. Now I have the opportunity to continue on.

Q: How did you find the sort of the mix of the school there?

GOLDTHWAIT: In Plattsburgh it was largely I guess you would say Anglo. The leading ethnic groups in the town, if you will, were French, English, Irish. In fact there were two Catholic Parishes, an Irish parish and a French parish.

Q: When you say French you mean French Canadian, right?

GOLDTHWAIT: French Canadian and there was a large French Canadian population in the community. I remember that the parochial school attached to the French Parish actually had "Ecole St. Pierre" in French on the building and up until maybe ten or fifteen years before we lived there some of the instruction in that school continued to be in French. There were a few people from other backgrounds and again they were university people; there was an air base in town that contributed a number of students so that was a more mixed population. There were some Jewish families who were resident in the community and that was about it, not terribly diverse.

Q: There was a metro mixture...I mean as far as the kid's sort of I mean the French kids play with the French kids and the Irish with the Irish or did they..?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not so much. There were basically two high schools, there was a Catholic High School and then there was a public High School. I don't really know what went on at the Catholic High School but at the public High School everybody mixed pretty much with everybody. There was a little bit of condescension, if you will, on the part of more the parents than the kids but some of the old families particularly in the community for generations vis-à-vis people from the air base or people from the university who maybe had been in this community for two years, five years, what have you, but not a whole lot of that.

Q: Well as you said there was a major air base was there much feeling about whether...the Viet Nam war was going on and did this raise much interest or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: I don't think it raised much more interest than anywhere else in the country. I remember coming down to Washington and starting college while the Viet Nam War was still on-going and there was a lot more excitement and interest about it here than I recall it from up in New York.

Q: How about was there much at the high school...what was the dating situation?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well people went out. I guess it depended a lot on whether or not you had a car. I, unfortunately, didn't so I didn't do a lot of dating in those years but everyone would have a date for major dances at the school and that sort of thing. Parents would be volunteered to help ferry folks around.

Q: Summer jobs?

GOLDTHWAIT: There were a limited number of summer jobs. The only thing I ever did was yard work for neighbors. The community is fairly depressed and coming from a family of university professors we were perhaps better off than 80 percent of the people and I didn't really feel like I should be taking a job away from someone who needed it more. Later after I started college I stayed in Washington for a couple of summers and had summer jobs.

Q: I take it all through high school and all it was assumed that you were going to go to college?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: Why did you pick American University?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well a number of reasons. First of all they sent recruiters up to a college night in the area and I was pleased by what they had to say. My mother had lived in Washington prior to getting married and prior to going to college for a couple of years. She was very, very much in favor of me coming down here for school. She liked the city and thought it had a lot to offer. So I guess those were probably the two chief factors. Eventually we made a little college tour and went to three or four of the places I applied to and I liked American University as well as any of them and ended up coming here.

Q: So you went to American University from when to when?

GOLDTHWAIT: From 1967 until 1971.

Q: What was American U. like, how did it strike you when you went there in '67?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well it was much quieter than it is today. Again it was much smaller, had about 5,000 undergraduates and about 5,000 continuing education and graduate students. Now I think it probably has close to twice that. You had this real feeling of being on a campus, the main buildings are still oriented around a green swath and that really was and still is the center of the community. I enjoyed the school very much. I had a lot of very good friends there. In those days it was a university where you got out what you put in, somewhat uneven in terms of the academic quality. Now the reports that I hear suggest it's actually gotten somewhat better.

Q: Well now what were you majoring in?

GOLDTHWAIT: I had a double major in international relations and history.

Q: Any particular area that you were sort of concentrating in?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well initially I thought of being a Russian studies specialist and took a lot of Russian history. I took a year of Russian language and eventually I decided not to specialize that much at that point and had a broader international relations degree.

Q: Did you find out on the sort of Russian side as opposed to the political science side was there sort of a cast or bias or something towards a political philosophy or something of that nature?

GOLDTHWAIT: The school was then very liberal in its outlook. I think particularly the school of international studies where I was and the school of government tended to be quite liberal. I can't really speak definitively about the college of liberal arts that much. But I would say liberal.

Q: You were there during the height of the anti-Viet Nam involvement or movement. How did it strike you and how did it strike the campus?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well students on campus were always involved in various protests and marches that took place around town here. I can remember attending one or two of them. At one point, but only once, I can remember some of the students actually rioted and started throwing things and breaking windows. The police came and they used a bit of tear gas and quieted things down but I can really only remember that happening on one occasion. Some of my friends had a more conservative bent and used to joke about the more liberal kids planning a campus revolution as if...well they went through the motions without really thinking too much about why they were doing it.

Q: Well now there was a lot of that. How did you feel about the Viet Nam war at the time?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well I thought it needed to be brought to a conclusion in the way sort of like the Iraq war today it's hard to know just how to do that. I was I suppose you'd say anti-war but I didn't simply think that they could just pull out and drop everything. I still had some belief I guess in the domino theory that was popular at the time.

Q: Personally, I think there was real validity, but now that its sort of discounted that I really think that we didn't do it well but _____ to gel so it was hard to...the revolution could have kept going. But it's a personal feeling I've shared.

How did the faculty react? What were you getting from the faculty?

GOLDTHWAIT: A variety of reactions and I think they sort of span the spectrum. I don't recall too many of the faculty other than one or two in, well maybe more than one or two, but a few in those two schools that I mentioned in government and international relations, I think a few of those faculty. The others didn't seem to bring their politics to the classroom very much.

Q: Did you get much of a feel for Washington? One of the great advantages to being in Washington is that one can call upon figures from all over the departments of the government and outside the government and all. Was that well used do you feel?

GOLDTHWAIT: I think so. I think a couple of internships at different places. I worked in a Congressional office that was mainly volunteer work, I worked in Hubert Humphrey's presidential campaign, and I also did an internship later for credit at the Democratic National Committee. Eventually I participated in something called the Washington International Seminar, which is a program AU ran mainly for students from other parts of the country to come to Washington for a semester and be introduced to as much as possible of what Washington has that was internationally oriented. They took just a few AU students into that program each year and I was one of them. So there we really went out and visited five or six different departments that had some sort of international work. I visited the World Bank, IMF, some of the other institutions around town, a couple of embassies. The real plumb was meeting with Averill Harriman at his house in Georgetown.

Q: It was a fine program actually our organization the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training finds seven AU interns every semester here. We have some today. Did you run across the State Department in your thinking and knowledge or anything like that?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well yes, I had always sort of assumed that I would go to work for the government. I think coming right out of school my first choice would probably have been related to the State Department. It turned out that I had some medical issues that delayed me getting onto the register after I finally did pass the Foreign Service exam. I failed it the first time and passed it the second time, and I never got called. In the meantime I had gone around to various of the other foreign affairs agencies and the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), where I spent most of my career was basically willing to hire me on the spot. So it was a job and I took it.

Q: Well now the Foreign Service exam you say you took it a couple of times. Do you recall any of the questions that were asked of you?

GOLDTHWAIT: I don't recall any of the specific questions. I do remember that at that point in time there was both a written examination, multiple choice, and then there was an interviewer with three panelists. I do recall that but I can't say I recall specific questions. I took so many of those standardized tests all in that period of five-six years.

Q: The Foreign Agricultural Service have you had any outside of having tomato fights in Davis had you had much experience...what attracted you to them and them to you?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, radically different thoughts. They liked me because I had a public administration degree and they saw me as an management intern who would end up leading one of their administrative offices in the organization some years down the pike. I liked them because they were a foreign affairs agency and I saw the possibility of eventually going overseas for them. I had to go through, because I had no agriculture background, I had to go through some gyrations to be able to do that which involved taking a couple of economic courses at the graduate level so I could qualify under the civil service rules as an agricultural economist between a couple years work experience and that course work. Eventually, I was able to move out of the management area there and into what they called a program area; I worked in the Cotton Division for about four years before going overseas for them.

Q: Well now did the Foreign Agriculture Service recruit separately from the Department of Agriculture?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, in various ways and I think it's still the case. Each of the constituent agencies of the Department of Agriculture did it's own recruiting. So FAS was recruiting for its own specific needs. They looked for people with backgrounds mainly in agricultural economics but then also in a few specialized areas at least in management ones, specialist areas.

Q: You started there what '71?

GOLDTHWAIT: '73.

Q: Had you gone to graduate school before?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: Doing what?

GOLDTHWAIT: I attended the public administration program of the Kennedy School at Harvard. Again that was a little unusual, most of the people that went into their public administration program were mid-career people who had worked in government for various public service agencies, institutions, for maybe five to ten years. They took that to get their masters degree. It took about sixty of those folks each year and about ten people like myself coming directly out of undergraduate work.

Q: How did you find the Kennedy school?

GOLDTHWAIT: I found it very, very good. The quality of the education was great, it was an interesting experience to actually take courses from people whose books you had been assigned to read as an undergraduate and you could do just about anything you wanted to do coursewise there. Whatever your interests were there was an opportunity to pursue it.

Q: At this point was there a significant other or not? Were you married?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I've never married.

Q: At the Kennedy School were you looking toward anything at that point? I mean had the Foreign Agricultural Service said, "Go get a degree and you'll be hired" or anything like that?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I had not really looked for any particular jobs but I think by that time I had pretty well assumed that I did want to go into the Foreign Service in one way or another.

Q: When you went to the Department of Agriculture did you find yourself surrounded by agricultural specialists or how did you find it?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, I was very much I won't say a fish out of water, because nobody ever made me feel uncomfortable about it, but I clearly didn't have the background and I was sort of scrambling to acquire that as I went along. I acquired at least enough of it so that I could do a good job.

Q: Was anybody saying, "Go spend a summer on a farm," or something like that?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, no one ever recommended that sort of thing. Quite a number or I'd say maybe half of the people who were coming into their service were trained as agricultural economists were people with no farm background.

Q: Did you get any feel for what were the issues for the Foreign Agricultural Service at that time? Were they pointed toward getting rid of surplus grain or doing what?

GOLDTHWAIT: This is one of the things I came to like about it. They were very much like they are now. They are just as much focused on trade promotions, export expansion, doing that through a number of mechanisms either direct export promotion activities, trade negotiations to break down barriers overseas, credit programs, a variety of different things. There were some surplus disposal programs, food aid programs that we don't call surplus disposal anymore but in those days they were surplus disposal. But there were all of those things that were designed to move American foreign products overseas and then the people that were in the overseas offices of the agency carried on the same kinds of activities within embassy contexts.

Q: What did you start to do at the beginning?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, at the beginning I was a management intern. I spent three months in the personnel division, three months in the fiscal and budget operations and three months in something that they called management analysis branch which was basically sort of reviewing how various internal systems of the agency worked and trying to make them work better.

I found that all except for one thing I did...in personnel I designed a language incentive awards program and a little bit of the budget work I kind of liked - but I found a lot of the rest of it rather tedious. Eventually I went to work in the budget shop for a couple years and that was better. Then I moved over to one of the program areas.

Q: What did you find interesting about the budget?

GOLDTHWAIT: Basically just sort of seeing how the whole agency was put together through the lens of the annual appropriations process. One of the things I did was to go over and represent the agency at these large interagency meetings chaired by someone from State Department where everybody would argue about their expenditures in the overseas embassies and all the constituent agencies would try to find ways to lower their workload counts for all of these different elements. Often State would try to find ways to pass along some of the common costs of keeping the embassy open, so that was quite amusing.

Q: I would have thought that coming from Foreign Agricultural Service you could pretty much point to generating so much money, which is sort of in the catbird seat as far as budget arguments because you were actually in one of the few elements of government that produced money?

GOLDTHWAIT: Actually we did not produce much money. We did have a few programs where we could exact user fees and that sort of thing and we did charge for participation in trade fairs that we operated overseas. But, that didn't contribute very much of the agency's budget.

Q: But you were in...selling our products abroad weren't you?

GOLDTHWAIT: We were in support of the private sector in selling them abroad. We were not selling products directly ourselves. We were donating it as food aid but the days when the Department of Agriculture actually sold product had ended by then. That was a phenomenon of the '50s and '60s although I later had the job that managed the programs that had replaced those sales programs.

Q: You say while after you sort of did this rotation from time to time you ended up in cotton, was that it?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about cotton. At that time where did cotton come from and what were we doing with it?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well it came from the United States, pretty much from the same place as it does today. Texas and California are the largest producing states. Arizona produces a fair amount and then there's a bit in states like Mississippi and smaller amounts in some of the other cotton states. The traditional cotton belt doesn't really produce much cotton anymore other than Mississippi. We produce probably about the same amount today that we were producing back then. In those days about half of it was used domestically and half of it sold. Today our domestic consumption has gone way down because the textile industry has basically moved offshore so we sell most of what we produce today overseas.

Q: Where is our market?

GOLDTHWAIT: The largest markets in those times were the Asian countries, Japan, Korea; Europe still took a fair amount although it was eroding. Now basically the market has shifted to other Asian countries, Indonesia takes an awful lot, Viet Nam; Pakistan both produces and imports a fair amount.

Q: Did you get any feel for the politics of cotton?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not so much then. I was fairly isolated from that side of it. In the meantime I did learn quite a bit about it.

Q: Well at that time during the '70s what were you doing with cotton, you?

GOLDTHWAIT: I was actually doing what we call commodity analysis. That is I would study the production and consumption patterns in different countries around the world, write periodic reports on them. I actually took one overseas trip to several countries in Latin America and got some first hand acquaintance with their industries.

Q: In Latin America I was trying to figure out what...who would be the recipient of cotton particularly?

GOLDTHWAIT: The largest importing country would be Mexico. Most of the other countries that were of interest were producing countries: Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. Colombia may have been part of it a little bit. The focus there was going to be on competition from the producing countries.

Q: Was American cotton of a particular quality?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was very well regarded for machine-picked cotton, some of the best quality in the world for machine-picked cotton. That said, people who ran textile mills will tell you that hand-picked cotton is of a higher quality because the machines will cause little tiny nicks in the fiber here and there and when you spin it that will cause problems with the yarn or thread that you are spinning.

Q: How did cotton live in the Foreign Agricultural Service? Is this a major element or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was. After the grains it was and in those days it was probably the next largest export commodity, several billion dollars a year. Now, it has been equaled by meat products, fresh fruits and vegetables and some other things that we didn't produce as much of back then or export as much as we do now.

Q: What you were doing with cotton and your work with cotton sort of separated from textiles as far as were they sort of that's another shop or something like that?

GOLDTHWAIT: There was a line between cotton and textiles and the textiles were under the purview of the Department of Commerce.

Q: Now this is during the Nixon period and he was very much involved in the textiles because this was where much of his political strengthen came from. So there was quite an interest in that. What did it take...so how long were you with the cotton side?

GOLDTHWAIT: I was there for about two and a half years.

Q: And then what?

GOLDTHWAIT: Then I had my first overseas assignment, which was in Germany.

Q: You were in Germany from when to when?

GOLDTHWAIT: From 1978-1982.

Q: Where were you assigned and what were you doing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the embassy in those days was in Bonn and I was the junior initially, the junior American among four American staff FAS had in country. I did a number of things. I managed a couple of trade shows each year including one in Berlin called Green Week. I also oversaw the reporting work of a couple of our German employees in the office which I thought was utterly ridiculous as they had been in the office twenty years covering the same commodities, writing the same reports year after year after year and I was supposed to edit them and improve them. But I did make small changes for English language grammar and that kind of thing. A lot of what we did was escorting American visitors around, people from various independent organizations funded by the Department of Agriculture that promote sales of specific commodities. Sometimes American business people although in Germany they didn't really need our help too much, and then there was always a heavy flow of government people that were coming over for various reasons.

Q: I'm trying to think, what were they, the American Foreign Agricultural Service doing in Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: Basically promoting sales of American products. Germany was our second or third largest overseas market in those days. We sold a lot of corn, a lot of vegetable oil, a lot of wheat, some processed products, fruits and vegetables were just beginning and we sold a fair amount of cotton to the Germans, a couple hundred thousand bales a year, tobacco and a number of things.

Q: I mean obviously at this point you were working across the board. Who are our competitors and how did that work out from your perspective?

GOLDTHWAIT: The competitors in Germany were largely the European countries that benefited from the subsidies of the common agricultural policy. In those days, the subsidies that the Europeans gave to themselves, to their farm community were much, much higher than what we had in this country. Now, they have reduced theirs a fair amount and ours have remained more or less the same so they are in closer balance. The Europeans are still higher but not with the disparity that existed back then. Their system of subsidies creates overproduction, if you will, in the sense that without those subsidies Europe would not produce as much as it does agriculturally so a lot of the competition was from other countries in Europe, particularly the southern countries and France.

Q: Well did you feel that particularly the French were looking over your shoulder all the time?

GOLDTHWAIT: Very much so. They in those days were the staunchest defenders of the common agricultural policy and it was a little bit amusing to watch because the Germans were also fairly staunch defenders of that policy. They benefited almost as much as the French and the Italians, not quite, but they were very subtle and they sort of geared the debate so the French and the Italians took all the hard lumps from the Americans and the Latin Americans and others who criticized these policies. But as over the past twenty years Europe has begun to reform its common agricultural policy and the Germans have been just about as reluctant to move as the others.

Q: How about trade fairs? What was the Berlin one? What were you doing there?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Berlin fair was called Green Week or "Grüne Woche" and it was different from other trade fairs in that it focused on consumer ready products and it was one of those things that had originated to support Berlin during the Cold War; it had sort of taken on a life of its own. So we weren't making a lot of sales there. We were just sort of displaying the products, getting the consumer reaction to the products. We would have maybe twenty different American companies and commodity associations that would come over and set up little booths in our exhibit and all of Berlin, like a county fair here, all the public would come in and spend the day walking around and eating themselves and drinking themselves crazy on all of these food products and all of these drinks and so forth that were being promoted.

The other trade fairs, there were two others that were very important in alternate years. One was in Munich and the other was in Cologne. They were actual trade events where people did business, and made contracts to supply the products that they were displaying over the course of the year.

Q: Did we have anything at the big Dresden Fair in East Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: In those days we had a very small presence there. I can't even really tell you what it was because we had a separate office in East Berlin that would have handled that side of things. I honestly don't now what that participation was.

Q: Did you feel that our participation in the German trade fairs was a bit of essentially sort of a USIA type showing the flag operation more than generating trade?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Berlin fair was pretty much that way and every now and then somebody would say we really ought to stop wasting our money here but we kept on doing it for those publicity reasons. The other two, ANUGA and IKOFA, were much more worthwhile and we still participate in them. I think we still participate in Gruene Woche too but it may be political as it once was.

Q: Were you getting much reaction from our farmers exchange programs about the German farmers and how they were doing? Because they really were heavily subsidized and I guess we were heavily subsidized but they had a much smaller territory. One has the feeling that it was almost hand-craftsmanship or something like that on their farms.

GOLDTHWAIT: Basically German farmers were trying to make themselves viable on maybe 25-50 acres and our farmers were trying to make it on maybe 3-400 acres. Now the Germans farm size particularly with the larger East German farms is probably more like 100-150 acres. There are still some small ones but ours have grown and they are probably an average farm size is probably somewhere between 800 and a thousand acres for commercial farms.

Q: Was there much and did the FAS sponsor farmer exchanges and that sort of thing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Some, not too much in Western Europe but the American Farm Bureau Federation would have exchanges with European farmers and we would occasionally sponsor a particular visit by specialized farmers to look at some aspect of U.S. farming.

Q: I assumed your German got better and better and better with this?

GOLDTHWAIT: It did, I had not really used it in what probably 14 years when I got back to Germany and the foundation that I had was what I called a while ago Kinder Deutsch. It was communication but it was fairly rough and jagged around the edges. I worked very hard on perfecting it for about the first three of the four years I was in Germany. It got to the point where when I came back I don't like to pat myself on the back but I will do it just a tiny bit, I tested out here at FSI when I returned from Germany at a 4-4. I think if I had tested the day I came back as opposed to waiting three weeks it probably would have been a 4+.

Q: To get the top, a 5-5, you really have to be born in the country.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, ja, ja, yes and now my German is nowhere near as good. It might be a 3-3 at best.

Q: Did you get any feel for German foreign politics?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes, I went to several of the conventions of their farm organization and listened to the speeches and wrote reports on them. I met essentially with the officials from the German ministry of agriculture because among the Americans in the office I did have the best German. I probably did more of that sort of thing than one would normally have done in one's first overseas assignment.

Q: How did foreign politics play in Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: It played very importantly in Bavaria and a couple of the other Laender. In the industrial north it was less important. I haven't really had much chance to look at German foreign policy since reunification but I imagine that it is also quite important in some of the eastern Laender.

Q: Particularly with the acquisition of East Germany, I mean this is the farmland, traditional farmland plus Bavaria.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: How were you used by the embassy?

GOLDTHWAIT: You mean other sections of the embassy?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

GOLDTHWAIT: Not a whole lot. We worked a bit with the economic section; there was an economic minister counselor who exercised a certain oversight over not only the state economic office but also the treasury attaché's office, the agricultural counselor's office, the Foreign Commercial Service office. We worked a little bit with the Foreign Commercial Service where there happened to be some activity or event that had both an agricultural and a more industrial face to it. But we were fairly independent.

Q: But did the German primary organizations get involved the way I noted in France where they all of a sudden because of some attempt to cut a subsidy or do something that they'll come to the capital and dump manure in front of the ministry and that sort of thing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not so much. The Germans occasionally would have a little protest march of some sort just as our farmers have on quite a few occasions over the past thirty years. There was a time when they went and drove their tractors up and down the mall to protest something or other. But the French and the Italians were always much more impassioned.

Q: How did you find social life in Germany?

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh, I loved it. I got in with a group of people from various embassies and other organizations and some German folks. There was a kind of an informal club that they called the Foreigners Club and it was mainly young people. They would do things together and one thing that we would do is take the train on weekends to some other city and see a play or see some other city, Amsterdam or wherever. So I got around quite a lot.

Q: Did you feel the embassy...who was your ambassador while you were there?

GOLDTHWAIT: Most of the time I was there it was Walter Stoessel and let's see the last year he left and I am trying to remember who came in. I don't recall right off, it was a political appointee who's name I should remember because he was prominent.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the Foreign Agricultural Service was included in things or did you feel neglected? I'm talking about the embassy activities.

GOLDTHWAIT: I think we didn't feel neglected. We had plenty of interchange with other people in the embassy and socialized together and I never really felt like we were neglected. We had a very particular mission, we were probably less involved in some things that FAS offices are involved with today that involve more of the rest of the mission like exchange programs and trade negotiations. So we had a very specific mandate and carried it out largely independently and kept our State colleagues informed and I think we were fine.

Q: So in what 1980 you left?

GOLDTHWAIT: '82.

Q: '82. You spent a good solid time there.

GOLDTHWAIT: Four years. I have had a very small number of overseas assignments as a Foreign Service officer but they've all been four years or more.

Q: Then where did you go?

GOLDTHWAIT: From Germany I went to Nigeria. I was actually the head of the FAS office there. That was a pretty good-sized office for FAS because at that point in time we viewed Nigeria very much as an up and coming market. We thought it was going to be the next country to break a billion dollars in sales. It has in the meantime but it did not while I was there because the Nigerians banned rice imports for a period of time. What that means is that exports were often then directed to neighboring countries rather than directly into Nigeria, and then smuggled in, but the level of trade suffered some.

Q: What was agriculture like in Nigeria at the time? This was like '80-'84?

GOLDTHWAIT: That would have been '82-'86.

Q: '82-'86.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah. Agriculture there is very much like what it is today in Nigeria, it hasn't changed a whole lot. There were two structures, one was small subsistence level farming and most of the producers or farmers participate in that kind of agriculture. They grow enough for their own immediate needs and families and sell a little bit in neighboring fresh markets.

The other structure is large, what you might call plantation farms, with some mechanization, some higher employment, not a whole lot different from American farms in that regard although probably the balance between mechanization and hired help is much more in the direction of hired help on those large scale farms. They didn't tend to do very well. They had a number of American farmers that came over and thought that they were going to introduce their own highly mechanized way of farming. Some of them spent millions of dollars trying and nearly all of them failed. There are a few large operations; some financed by World Bank loans other development agencies in the country. They've done a little better but they aren't nearly living up to the promise that they were supposed to achieve.

Q: What was our concern? Did you find yourself overlapping with AID there or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: Initially when I got there, there was no AID office and what little bit of work that was done developmentally in agriculture came my way. It was people like Ambassador Pickering saying, "Chris, I'm going up to somewhere upcountry tomorrow I want you to come and listen to what they are asking for and see if there is anyway we can help them." So I did a fair amount of that in the absence of an AID mission. What we could actually do without an AID mission was generally fairly limited but at least we could listen. There was probably, again because there was not an AID mission, our office was probably more directly involved with other embassy sections than had been the case in Germany.

One of the more interesting projects was getting some improved peanut seed for the head of the Nigerian Air Force. His father had a farm up country, and I met him through a business contact. He had a habit of sort of holding court with his pals over dinner when he got home from work around 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon. If I had some progress to report I would drop by at that time and join the group for long enough to bring him up to date. Eventually we got the seed peanuts from a USAID multiplication project over in the Cameroon.

Q: What was the problem with the Nigerians...I'm not talking about the small farms but about the big ones?

GOLDTHWAIT: The infrastructure was not available to support the level of mechanization that people were trying to apply. In other words, you had a mismatch between let's say the scale of mechanization that people thought they wanted to apply and the work that could really be supported. It was aggravated by problems with employment, equipment and spare parts for equipment, getting import licenses. In those days the foreign exchange situation was very badly skewed, the Naira was highly overvalued and what this meant was the Central bank had to ration the foreign exchange so it was difficult to pay for imports. There was no electricity outside of the capital and in Lagos it operated maybe fifty percent of the time.

Q: Well Nigeria has a worldwide reputation for being corrupt and all. How did that play out agricultural wise?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well it was a problem to get anything done. People had to grease palms. It helped to know important people in the country to avoid it.

Q: Well did you get involved with...in a way what did we care about Nigeria?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well from an agriculture standpoint it was an important market for rice initially and wheat and feed grains, and for sorghum and barley malt for the brewing industry.

Q: Well did the corruption factor intrude on that?

GOLDTHWAIT: It did. The rice importers all had to use corrupt methods to get their import licenses. I hesitate to say it because most of them are American owned but I suspect the flour mills found a way to do the same thing. The mechanism I think is fairly familiar. You have a local partner who handles those things; the American company doesn't have to be involved.

Q: Yeah. How did you find working there? Was it frustrating, fun? Or what?

GOLDTHWAIT: I found it fascinating. Initially it was quite overwhelming, it was very difficult to get anything done and as I sort of figured out how to get a few things done I found that immensely satisfying. Again I had a lot of good friends there and a lot of very good contacts some of whom I'm still in touch with. I quite enjoyed my four years there.

Q: How did you find Nigerians as people?

GOLDTHWAIT: Most of the people I ran into were either Yoruba or Hausa. The Yoruba are very much like New Yorkers and if you relate to them the way you relate to New Yorkers you get on just fine. It could be very enjoyable working with them and socializing with them. The Hausa, who tended to be the northern agricultural people, are quieter and reserved. You need to be very courteous and treat them with a great deal of respect.

Q: Sounds like Norwegian farmers in Minnesota or something like that.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes and again we got on very well. I had some excellent contacts in the northern community.

Q: Did you get any feel for the reach of the government, the Nigerian government?

GOLDTHWAIT: The reach of the government?

Q: I mean how they influenced and then controlled things.

GOLDTHWAIT: Well basically you had to have government support for just about anything that you wanted to get done in the country. It was very useful to be able to relate to a few people who were well connected. I found that I did my own little thumbnail analysis of the government structure in Nigeria in those days. There were many changes of government during the time I was there. It was initially a presidential form of government, then there were two coups d'etat so there were actually three different governments in that four years. What I saw was that the governing structure was what I would call a rather narrowly defined republic. By that I mean that in those days certain interest groups, certain families, certain influential politicians and tribal groups were all represented in the inner circle of each of those three governments. When the elected president was thrown out in the first coup d'etat all of the ministers got fired and all their cousins and brothers and third cousins came in and took the same jobs. When the next coup d'etat took place the same thing happened but the core group of the people who were influential remained pretty much the same. It was almost like a republic in that all of these interests were balanced in each of those governments. Later there was an additional coup and one of the military dictators who came in centralized everything a lot more and behaved more dictatorially, and that system went out the window. But that was after I was gone.

Q: Hearing a professor talk about Africa saying that, "In the United States or European countries if your government changes you lose your job and you have to move on and become something else. But in Africa," he said, "if you lose that job with the government there is nothing else to go to." So it's much more crucial to hang on or to do whatever you can.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah, this is one of the reasons that I think much of our effort to promote democracy in Africa is misguided. In many of these countries there is no really independent private sector, everything is directly or indirectly dependent on the government so there is only one basis for power, which is the government, and you can't really have contested political elections with multiple political parties when none of the parties except the ruling party have resources to compete. I think that if we had focused our attention on helping a diverse group of people develop an independent basis of power and authority in the country they would get a lot further in eventually promoting democracy, rather than by insisting on a structural formula.

Q: Who are the organizations or groups of people that you ran across in the United States who are interested in our agricultural ties with Nigeria?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was mainly trade promotion groups. It's probably not generally known but pretty much every commodity of the major commodity has its own trade promotion group. You've got one for wheat, Wheat Associates; you've got one for food grains, called the U.S. Grains Council; you have them for rice, cotton, most of the fruits and vegetables and different groups like that. So all of those groups, not all of them but a number of them viewed Nigeria as a very important and up and coming market for their products and they would send people over there to work with me on various efforts of trade promotion.

Q: Well did you see this given the restraints or constraints of corruption and just the Nigerian market structure and all? Did you see it as much of a place to try to sell stuff?

GOLDTHWAIT: Because they are so food deficit they had to have a certain level of imports even with the corruption, even with trying to do things from a policy standpoint that would interfere with the trade, ultimately they still needed to import a certain amount. When I was there they were importing around a million tons of wheat a year and now they are importing two million tons of wheat a year. So somehow or other you have to have those imports to keep people fed. So a way is and what's found to keep some level of the trade flowing even if people at the top decide that they wanted to try and interfere either to get paid off or because they thought it made good policy to say well we are going to be self sufficient next year.

Q: From what I've heard the city is like Accra and the new capital. In fact ACCRA got so...is it Accra?

GOLDTHWAIT: Abuja.

Q: I mean...

GOLDTHWAIT: Abuja.

Q: Abuja, I mean when it gets too crowded you move your capital and go somewhere else. But there must be an awful lot of people who have to be fed that aren't really able to earn enough to feed themselves.

GOLDTHWAIT: There is a problem with unemployment and poverty in the country. The country has a lot of oil income but the distribution is very skewed so you have a lot of people that are hawking pencils in the traffic jams and that kind of thing.

Q: At the time was there a good market for commodities?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes.

Q: How did it go? I mean did it go with major firms who then distributed or how did it work?

GOLDTHWAIT: In the case of most of the principal import commodities there were a handful of importers. In the case of flour there were I think four milling companies each of which had two or three flour mills in different parts of the country.

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1, with Chris Goldthwait. Yeah, you were saying?

GOLDTHWAIT: There would be a handful of major importers for each of those commodities. The rice went pretty quickly into retail channels, it was not further processed, the wheat was milled, food grains were milled and barley malt and sorghum for the brewing industry went into the breweries and ultimately then into regional channels.

Q: Well now I don't know if timing changes but I can remember there was a period when Nigeria was renown for the backlog at its port. I mean it would take two months to get a ship unloaded. I'm just making up a figure but anyway there was a tremendous problem. How did that...was that happening in your time?

GOLDTHWAIT: That happened a couple of years before I arrived and the worse period was right around 1980 and by the time I got there the backlog had pretty much dried up. The country was having foreign exchange problems and I don't know maybe oil production had fallen off a little bit temporarily. So there wasn't the same level of imports. A lot of what had been imported was targeted for infrastructure development and a lot of that had been finished or as finished as it was going to get by the time I got there.

Q: How about ministers of agriculture? Did you have much to do with them?

GOLDTHWAIT: I would see the minister of agriculture several times a year and I would also see the number two person, the permanent secretary in the ministry, more frequently.

Q: Did you have any principal points of contacts in the United States of people who were interested in Nigeria from the agriculture aspect who would come to see you all the time?

GOLDTHWAIT: We had a sort of binational commission, if you will, of people interested in agriculture. It was something called the Joint Agricultural Consultative Committee and it had about 30 members from businesses and organizations on the U.S. side and a similar number of Nigerian participants and a few people from the government on each side. Those folks were trying to do things like joint ventures and investing in Nigerian agriculture or food processing.

Q: How did visitors in the United States react to Nigeria when they got there? I mean coming through the airport, the city and all that?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, some of them were shocked because particularly the airport can appear to be very chaotic. Often times if a person had not been to the country before and I was going to be helping them I would meet them at the airport. The embassy had a certain number of passes so that we could get in beyond the counters and you could actually meet people as they were approaching through the immigration line and help them through and the people at Pan American airlines would also let us through sometimes. So we could do that and we could help people that were otherwise going to be overwhelmed.

Q: OK, well then you left there when?

GOLDTHWAIT: In 1986.

Q: And where did you...we will end here for this session but I like to put at the end where we will pick up. In 1986 where did you go?

GOLDTHWAIT: I came back to Washington.

Q: So we will pick this up in 1986 when you came back to Washington.

GOLDTHWAIT: Maybe I can add one other little thing about...well two other things that I think were perhaps a little unusual one more so than the other. After the first of the coups d'état we went into a period where the official relations between the U.S. and Nigeria were quite frosty because the coup had thrown out the presidential government. The constitution was based largely on our own and we took a dim view of that, we didn't like a military dictatorship throwing out an elected president. We had almost no official relationship for a better part of the year. The person who was able to keep us the best informed on what was really happening in the country and the new government was President Obasanjo who at that point of time was running his farm in Otta outside of Lagos. So when the ambassador, who at that point was Tom Smith, would really need to find out what was going on I would send a little note out to my farm friend Mr. Obasanjo and I would say, "The ambassador would like to come out on Friday and see what's new at your farm and he would like to come at nine o'clock or ten o'clock, whatever." He would send a note back and say, "Well Friday isn't convenient but if you can come Thursday at nine o'clock I'll be ready for you." So we would go out and the ambassador and Obasanjo would play the charade right to the hilt. They would spend about half an hour or 45 minutes walking around the farm and I would be escorting the ambassador. There would always be something new that he was trying out, that Obasanjo was trying out. One time it was pineapples and another time it was a mushroom house. Then after seeing what was new at the farm he would invite us over to a little outdoor gazebo he had and serve us some palm wine made fresh on the farm there and the ambassador would pump him like crazy for everything that was happening in the government. Who was doing what? What was the policy on this and all of that? So I would end up as the agriculture counselor writing a political reporting cable. I did that for perhaps five or six times and that was great fun.

The other thing I should mention which was very much a formative experience was that about three months before I was due to rotate out of the country I was driving my car home from the embassy one afternoon and I stopped about one block from my house to buy a bag of flour from a street vendor. When I started to get back in the car with my flour there was a man standing there with a gun who asked me for my car keys. So I had my car stolen at gunpoint. I think that if that had happened at the beginning of my tour it probably would have soured me on the country completely and I might have even tried to curtail or something. That happening at the end of a four-year tour, which had been very rewarding both personally, and professionally, it didn't take the damper off.

Q: What happened? Insurance or did you get the car back?

GOLDTHWAIT: The car was across the border into Benin within two hours, no chance of getting it back. I got an insurance settlement, which was actually quite generous. The car was four years old at that time but because they had given me not only the blue book value but also what it would have cost to transport a new vehicle over there I came away with not what I would have gotten from selling the car because one could sell one's vehicles at very inflated values, but I came away within a couple of thousand dollars of what I had paid for it and I had four years of good use from it.

Q: All right, will then we'll pick this up in 19...

GOLDTHWAIT: '86.

Q: '86 when you're coming back to Washington. Good.

Q: OK, today is the 31st of January 2008. Chris, what was it 1986? What were you up to in 1986, what were you doing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well when I got back from Nigeria I went back to the Foreign Agriculture Service, Washington, DC office, and I became the deputy director of the grains division. There were two deputy directors and I was in charge of what they called the commodity analysis function which was basically gathering data on the production and trade of various grains around the world and publishing both statistics and analysis of trends in democracy situations.

Q: In the first place, let's get a little bit about the office. Who was sort of at the top...how was the office constituted where you were working?

GOLDTHWAIT: There was a division director who had a strong personality.

Q: Who was that?

GOLDTHWAIT: His name was Don Novotny and he was a micro manager. He had two deputies, myself and the other deputy who oversaw the market promotion activities for U.S. sales and trade overseas. The interesting thing was about every six months he would decide that he would reorganize the division and he would move different parts of it around. We were always scrambling to try to make whatever the infrastructure he was providing work. We had quite a number of new to agency employees, people in their first work experience right out of grad school, and this was obviously destabilizing for them. So I had a great deal of compassion for them.

Q: How did you feel about him being a micro manager and strong personality, how did he fit in with the rest of the department? His effectiveness would you say?

GOLDTHWAIT: He was extremely well respected because of his command of all of the details of world grain markets and he understood a great deal about how those markets worked. So he was quite influential within the department. One of the functions that was developing at that time was the use of export subsidies to promote sales, particularly U.S. wheat, and he had designed a program structure for that activity for example.

Q: Well grain has always been sort of the major export and one of our tools around the world hasn't it? This is the sort of the major commodity isn't it?

GOLDTHWAIT: It certainly was and remains one of the major commodities that we export today. On a value basis it is probably no longer as dominate as it once was.

Q: Well how, I mean, the use of grain handed to people who...countries that don't have it. I mean this is a powerful tool to avoid starvation; it's a good commodity to deliver because there is an awful lot of return. I mean health wise for a sack of wheat; you can do a hell of a lot with it. There must have been an awful lot of...did you feel it, of politics both American politics to get the stuff out there and get money for it and two where we are trying to make an impact on other countries.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, both kinds of politics were very much involved and you can kind of look at the commercial markets for the first of those factors, i.e., get rid of it and then the food aid markets, if you will, for the unofficial humanitarian impact which we like to make with it. At that particular time on the commercial side because of heavy use of export subsidies by the Europeans and other countries we were not competitive. Australia and Argentina were closer to being competitive and further removed from the Europeans than we and the Canadians, and for that reason we actually subsidized our commercial sales.

Q: What was your particular focus in your looking at where grain was coming from?

GOLDTHWAIT: The staff that I supervised that was in charge of getting information about the world grain trade from a variety of sources first of all from the agricultural attaches around the world and their regular reporting most of which was quarterly some of which was monthly and some of which was even weekly or even daily. We also worked with a variety of contacts in the grain trade around the world to get their views of market trends and that sort of thing.

Q: Grain is then traded out of Chicago mainly at that time?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, mainly as much as anywhere else in this country out of Minneapolis, which is the headquarters of Cargill.

Q: I've been to the...

GOLDTHWAIT: The market, the principal futures market is in Chicago. The other cities of the grain trade were Paris and Geneva and to a lesser degree London.

Q: What about the CIA? They are supposed to gather all information on all sorts of things, were they an important source for you?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, they really didn't collect that kind of information. In fact, they probably took our data and used it for their World Fact Book and that sort of thing.

Q: What about the Soviet Union when you were doing this? This is one of our principal tools or interest was the Soviet Union and the grain deals and looking at the Soviet grain trade. How important was this and what were you getting about the Soviet Union at that time?

GOLDTHWAIT: They were one of our largest markets, in many years the largest market for us. I think they would hit ten or twelve million tons a year, if I remember correctly. We got information from our attaché in Moscow. We probably did get some information from the CIA classified on what was actually happening in the Soviet Union but much of the kind of information that we needed was openly available and it was pretty hard to hide whether your crop is good or bad.

Q: Were you picking up anything else? I remember at one point there was a place in the Soviet Union where whether this was true, that we were sending substandard grain and all that. Was this a problem or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh that is a perpetual problem. There are always going to be people that don't think they are getting the quality they paid for. One of the practices in the grain trade unfortunately or fortunately depending on you looked at it is to grade down to precisely the grade that had been in the contract to the sale. So if, by chance, you get some wheat or corn that is of a higher quality perhaps it has less what they call foreign matter, i.e., trash mixed in, well trash is cheaper than corn so the grain company will add a little bit to get to precisely the grade that was in the sale. Sometimes they go a little overboard in that so sometimes you get legitimate grain complaint from that.

Q: What happens? Do they return the grain? Do they where it appears bad or whatever do they negotiate a different price? What happens?

GOLDTHWAIT: Generally there are arbitration clauses in the contract that will describe how this should be handled and usually this results in a price adjustment or in some cases you bring in an independent arbitrator who says no the grain is of the quality and standard described and there is no basis for a complaint.

Q: How did you work...what was the role of the State Department?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well in this particular job I really didn't work very much with State although they would be interested to a degree in agricultural conditions and various imports of foreign countries but they were again primarily just users of the data that we were compiling and using. Occasionally, obviously if there was a negotiation with major grain sales to the Soviet Union State would have been a little bit more involved in that kind of thing, but I was not working with those transactions at that point of my career. Years later I became very much involved in that.

Q: What about the...what were we doing say with India? I mean India had gotten in a similar type of dispute, surplus of gluttons and all of that because essentially grain sales went down. What was happening...how stood the situation with India at the time?

GOLDTHWAIT: India had by that time become pretty much self sufficient in grain, particularly in wheat production. They may have imported a little bit from time to time or they may have needed a particular quality for particular use where they could not produce it domestically, a specific quality of wheat. But they were pretty much self-sufficient basically by this time.

Q: Where were some of the other areas? I guess we were following particularly Canada, Australia and Argentina. I mean these were...

GOLDTHWAIT: And the EU.

Q: And the European community, it was the European community back then? How competitive were we? How cooperative were we? I was asking about all these entities we were talking about, all these countries we are talking about that have good statistics and I imagine we had good relations so that this wasn't a problem of trying to figure out where they were going any more?

GOLDTHWAIT: For the producing countries by and large that was true. For the importing countries Russia, China for example, in China, they would have statistics but often times they were available only with a delay, they waited until the immediate impact, statistics, would no longer be an issue and would release them later so we had to make our own crop estimate. Then also in many developing countries that were increasingly important markets there were poor statistics or statistics were state secrets for example.

Q: Let's talk about were we were working with China at this point?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, China was an important market and remains an important market for us.

Q: The Chinese obviously it's a closed, well not a closed economy but it is a controlled economy pretty much. What were we seeing about...would we have to wait for the last minute to get these statistics and what they wanted?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well our agricultural counselor and staff in Beijing and also the office we had in Hong Kong would make their estimates based on what people in the trade were saying; they somewhat could tell by traveling around the country. Further we would have annual consultations, maybe meeting twice a year, with COPCO, which was the Chinese monopoly importing authority for wheat. We would get together and we would talk a little bit about what their prospective needs were so that we could make information available for our grain trade and get a position to help supply those needs. These talks were always a little bit artificial. The Chinese would never want to be totally upfront about what their situation was; they thought that withholding a little of information would strengthen their negotiating position in terms of purchases from the private exporting houses. But they would give us some indication of whether needs were likely to be somewhat greater this year or somewhat less and we factored that into our reporting.

Q: How competitive in the market were we with Australia, Canada, Argentina and the European Union?

GOLDTHWAIT: We were slightly less competitive than Australia, Argentina and Canada primarily because of the way in which our farm programs did and still do, keep our domestic prices somewhat inflated. I think we were uncompetitive vis-à-vis the Europeans because they were heavily subsidizing their exports. They basically took the view that they would pay their farmers a very high price to produce and then they would buy down that price to wherever they had to, in order to get rid of the grain on the world market. So they would subsidize the production and export sides of it. To a degree they still do that although they have reformed their export subsidy system over the past five or six years.

Q: You were doing this from when to when? '86 to?

GOLDTHWAIT: To about '88.

Q: How much were we subsidizing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well actually I continued to work with the subsidy program and technically managed the subsidy program. At different times when grain, particularly wheat after the cheap grain subsidizing was in heavy supply the subsidies counted for perhaps half of the domestic U.S. value. In other words, you might have wheat trading for around \$150 a ton in the domestic U.S. market and you would be subsidizing that for export at perhaps \$75. That would be an extreme sort of the lowest type of subsidy, the lowest selling price reached in those years. In fact, it was probably the early '90s before the price was that low, and then things turned around a little bit and we stopped using subsidy programs probably in about 1997.

Q: During this period how was sort of the weather and conditions for Americans?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well for our producers reasonably good. I don't recall although I may be wrong that there were any real disastrous years. Our country is big enough and has enough variety among it in different regions so that so that if you have drought in one area chances are you have a field with a pretty good harvest in another area if you say that you don't have sizable area fluctuations. But I think it would be more related to area changes, area climate.

Q: Any particular crisis during this period for you?

GOLDTHWAIT: At this juncture no, not really. Aside from my managerial headaches trying to work with this particular boss, and we got along well, I don't mean to say we didn't get on well, I think his style is what one had to work around that. Aside from that it was fairly routine period for the most part. It was fairly quiet.

Q: You were mentioning young people coming on board. How did you work with them to get themselves used to a typical office situation?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well we had two very senior people, one who worked on the coarse grain side and who one worked on wheat who would basically train them in the practice of what they needed to do to collect the data and put it out in various forms internally within the department and publications. They looked into that and I basically tried to work on the...to try to be the back-up so to speak and to add some guidance to them on how to get accustomed to the office, that kind of thing.

Q: In your area was there much...was there anyone coming in who actually ran a wheat field or cornfield?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well many of the young people coming out of graduate school with masters and agriculture economics would be from farm families. There has been this tremendous decrease in U.S. farm population. There are only about two percent of the work force in farming in this country, maybe a little more if you count hobby farms. So a lot of people come from farm families who wanted to maintain some kind of work in the general area of agriculture. So many of them had grown up on farms and knew more about it than I do.

Q: Well then when was the next sort of significant change in your world?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well after about two years I was asked to become one of the deputy assistant administrators at the Foreign Agriculture Service in an area called International Agricultural Statistics. This area did a number of things. It ran a program based on remote sensing from satellites that would photograph and then it would evaluate data from the various satellites, it also was the area that ran the information services function for the agency. Then it also had some responsibility for other kinds of data gathering but frankly it's slipped my mind right at the moment. It was an area of some interest but I was really only there for a very brief period of time.

Q: Going back with the other earlier period, what were some of the countries that you were interested in potentially, what were the developing countries which were really coming up and becoming major consumers? Who were they and...?

GOLDTHWAIT: Mexico, Egypt, Iraq was a major buyer, Pakistan not so much. I mentioned China, some of the African countries but more from a stand point of food aid. The North African countries were commercial buyers, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia they were important commercial buyers. Korea was a very important buyer.

Q: Were there any particular problems from these countries? Anything that stands out?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the Egyptians were a bit of a commercial problem and North African countries because of their proximity to the European Union. They were at a tremendously great advantage at the time in the markets, which coupled together with the European Union subsidies meant our subsidies in those countries had to be higher than in other parts of the world. So there were those kinds of problems. In places like Iraq the issue was credit and...

Q: You are talking about Iraq before the invasion, it was under Saddam Hussein but it was before the invasion of Kuwait and all of things that happened.

GOLDTHWAIT: Correct, yes.

Q: And it was also at war.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes they were at war with the Iranians during some of this time.

Q: What were the problems like?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well with Iraq they were credit takers so we would negotiate an annual line of credit guarantees and that would determine the way to negotiate what commodity guarantees would be used for and that would determine what the cost was to us. There were a couple of other countries that were heavy users of the credit guarantees; Mexico and Korea, which were very important.

Q: Were the Mexicans in a way Mexico, the United States and Canada there are so many ties that the State Departments role in that maybe even the cultural departments role get somewhat diminished because everybody has got their own contacts. Did you find this either confusing or a problem?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well our role is all in terms of the market promotion responsibilities; it's always to support the private sector exporters. Only in the cases of countries that centralized economic control did our relationship with those particular countries determine the sales. Generally in those cases we would have a consultation with the State Department, they would have some influence on what we did but generally speaking the stand point of the State Department was pro trade even in cases where our political relations may have been a little bit uneasily with a particular country for a particular period so they would tend to want us to do what we needed to do in order to remain players in determining particular countries.

Q: On agricultural products what the Commerce Department was not a player?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, they really did not. They have some role in exports of highly processed products, market promotion activity and that sort of thing but generally not.

Q: How about the...?

GOLDTHWAIT: Textiles was an area where Commerce gets involved.

Q: How about the private exporter? Did any of them give you particular problems? Were they a difficult group? I don't know were there any problems that came up?

GOLDTHWAIT: Umm.

Q: Short trading? Ineptitude or I don't know.

GOLDTHWAIT: Not so much problems of that kind because it tended to be the private sector that handled those problems itself. To a certain degree they are self-regulated because if one company has a reputation for kind of pretty close to the edge, quality wise and stuff it loses business. The issues that we dealt with where it could be difficult to work with the private sector were where they wanted us to use a certain government support program to support exports and the circumstances where for one reason or another we didn't think it was appropriate and people were always coming in and lobbying for use of one program or another program. I had that a great deal in the job that I had pretty much all of the 1990s.

Q: Well in your job in 1990 how long were you doing that?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the job I moved to in about 1988 I had only about six months. Then somewhat to my surprise I was asked to become what is called the Assistant Administrator for Export Credits. That particular job is one that brought me into contact with the credit guarantee programs and food aid programs that the Department of Agriculture manages. I had that job...getting that job was probably the closest I came to having a sort of a real lucky break in my career because I moved after a very brief period of time from a job that was a step lower to becoming one of the four or five upper managers in the Foreign Agricultural Service and one of the senior people. I was only an FSO-1 at the time and it was extremely unusual so it was a big career jump.

I've never understood why the administrator selected me for that; however, I suspect it may have been because of an unofficial memo I had written beforehand. The agency at that time started to have some racial problems and there were strong suspicions between black and white and management in the agency. We had a racial incident where someone defaced a poster that was advertising Martin Luther King Day activities. When that happened the black employees in the agency became very, very defensive. I wrote a memo to the administrator, I just went in and left it on his desk one day when he was at lunch that analyzed some of these problems. It said, in effect, the problem was not just one of racial bias, there was racial bias here in the workplace, but the problem was also one of how we manage the advancement of our employees. There wasn't anything since then that might have made me stand out from a dozen other people who might have been considered for that particular job and all of whom probably were more senior than I was at that time.

Q: What had been the problem? Was there a sort of a barrier for minorities to move up, or sort of an attitudinal problem?

GOLDTHWAIT: The problem was really one favoring the Foreign Service employees in the agency and it so happened that the Foreign Service employees were white, again because they were the folks off the farms who managed to get to college and get master degrees in ag economics. It was a lot easier for white farmers to do that than black farmers in parts of the country where you have a heavy concentration of black farmers. That meant that promotions tended to go to people who were in the Foreign Service, people that had better education. And the agency did not at that time really undertake much in the way of effort to provide additional educational opportunity to people who had come into the agency who were well qualified and wanted to get a head but hadn't had the education previously. The agency moved in that direction on this issue and it now has done a much better job of it.

Q: OK where you are now, the name of your title that you moved to?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Assistant Administrator for Export Credits, and there I managed the area of the agency that worked on the export programs and did a little bit of work on the export subsidy program, sort of the last step of the payments and also worked on the food aid programs.

I should probably spend a moment describing the structure of the agency. The agency basically has an Administrator and two deputies who are the Associate Administrator and the General Sales Manager. The General Sales Manager at that point oversaw all of the marketing and all of the trade analysis and all of the food aid activities of the agency. The Assistant Administrator for Export Credits was also the Deputy to the General Sales Manager. The five or six assistant administrators were among the eight or ten people that managed the Foreign Agricultural Service. One oversaw the commodities analysis divisions, there was one who oversaw the agriculture attache area, one trade policy and so on.

Q: What was the rationale for export credits? I mean was this a form of subsidy or what?

GOLDTHWAIT: The rationale was that the private sector would not by itself, advance credit for sales at least in the quantities that you wanted to make the sales to a number of the markets that were of limited credit worthiness. I've mentioned Egypt and Iraq as cases. At one point, South Koreans were using this program but by this time they were probably at a point that they didn't really need it any longer; today they don't need it. But the private sector was not going to advance credit in large amounts to these countries without the government guarantee. And yes the Europeans in particular and some others view these programs as subsidy programs. This is a very big issue in the ongoing WTO negotiations right now in 2008. We lost the so-called cotton case about two years ago which involved these programs and they were modestly reformed as a result of that although the Brazilians, Europeans and others still consider the current operation to be insensitive.

Q: How would you set, I won't say necessarily priorities but the targets? Iraq is an oil producing country but it's got a war on who was saying well let's do something about Iraq because we want Iraq to get our grain, how did it work there?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well this is an interesting question because the first thing I noticed when I came into this job was that there was no rationale for how we would decide that this country gets this amount of credit. So I would say the first sort of big-ticket career achievement that I was responsible for was introducing a risk analysis procedure that would determine the level of credit that a particular country was eligible for credit guarantees. I found one of the incoming junior professionals in the agency who happened, before getting his agricultural degree and coming to us, to have worked in a bank for a couple of years, he was a lending officer in the bank. So he and I developed together this credit worthiness mechanism that is still being used after, gosh that would have been around 1990, so it still here 18 years later. As a result of that, through most of the 1990s our credit guarantee programs operated on a break-even basis and if you looked at the dollar and cents of the losses vis-a-vis the fees that we charged then most of the years in the 1990's we broke even. That was not true on loans made earlier than 1990 and it is not true today.

Q: When we take an on-going program and all of a sudden it hasn't been you might say rationalized and all of a sudden someone comes in and rationalizes it this means that favorite countries and all of that all of a sudden are finding themselves in a different setting. An awful lot of oxen are being gored in this particular...I mean you must have had howls of protests both from within the department and abroad?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well actually the main country for which it was doing no rational, the same country for which the credit committee set up recommended a drastic cutback was Iraq. At about that time Iraq invaded Kuwait and obviously we weren't going to give them any further credit. So to a degree the biggest problem resolved itself. There were smaller cutbacks regarding some other countries but we found that in the case of a number of the countries we could still provide reasonably generous allocations. One country whose allocation shrank significantly as I recall was Algeria. We went from being willing to provide perhaps \$750 million a year to only \$500 million a year. So there were some declines but the other declines were easier to manage.

Q: I would think...you mentioned Algeria. Algeria used to be a major agriculture producer. Was somebody at either the State Department or the Department of Agriculture saying, "Hey, get with it why don't you get your act together?" Or was this just not part of the problem?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, Algeria and I think this is still true, had instituted centralized control of its agriculture. This means it did not have market incentives, production had stagnated and as population grew. The population in Algeria has grown fairly rapidly and it depended heavily on imports. We were not providing technical assistance to Algeria at least not in any sizeable quantity because they didn't need a lot of money. The idea was that they don't need AID funding, they can do things for themselves and besides the real problem is one of how the government manages its economy and if they are not willing to loosen control of it and reform that then it's not really our responsibility to try and provide technical assistance.

Q: Were there any problems? I mean you are one of the principal players now in the Foreign Agricultural Service. Were there any sorts of bureaucratic struggles between the various components of this? Did you find yourself fighting these battles?

GOLDTHWAIT: Actually, it is a fairly collegial group. I forgot about this earlier but there was a policy issue between myself and the Assistant Administrator for Trade Policy in the Uruguay Round Negotiations over the degree to which we would be willing to place restrictions on credit guarantee programs. But we resolved that and moved forward.

Q: You were doing this for how long?

GOLDTHWAIT: I was in that job until, let's see I went into that job in probably around 1988 and in 1991 the political appointee who was the General Sales Manager resigned and I became the Acting General Sales Manager and then the Clinton administration came in early 1993, probably around May, I was appointed as the General Sales Manager.

Q: You are saying '32?

GOLDTHWAIT: So I was in the job of Assistant Administrator for Exports Credits for about three years or a little better and for the last year and a half of that time I was also the Acting General Sales Manager, so I was doing both jobs.

Q: So that takes us up to when?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well that would take us up to about May of 1993 when I actually became the sales manager. I should probably talk about a couple of things that were interesting that I did while I was still the assistant administrator for export credits. Because of the role of food aid and the credit guarantee programs I became rather heavily involved in the efforts of U.S. government to support the liberalizing governments in former communist Eastern Europe and eventually in the former Soviet Union.

I was the natural person to do that because these were the programs that we had with which we could support the new governments. For example when Lech Walesa became president of Poland one of the few things we had available that we could provide immediately was food aid because surplus stocks. I remember having a copy somewhere of a little cartoon that appeared in one of the newspapers where you had Walesa walking into a fancy hotel room in U.S., I don't know New York or Washington, and a towel over on the side and you had the bed. On the bed instead of a little piece of chocolate where the bed was turned down you had a bag of sorghum. So we were providing little bits and pieces where there was a need for it through food assistance and I began to work quite closely with senior people in the Department and the Secretary on the overall efforts of USDA to support the Administration's work in trying to help these economies.

One of the things I did was to manage a presidential mission to Poland shortly after the end of Communism, which was headed by cabinet members, Secretary Yeutter and Mrs. Dole who was Secretary of Labor at that time and the Secretary of Commerce. Yeutter was the head of this mission. We also had the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers along and one other person who had Cabinet status, I think. But that was interesting because we were trying to put together a mission that would highlight the private sector in a country that was really still structured in a communist way. Even the agricultural attaché^{1/2} who assisted me in trying to work with the embassy and put together all of this you know incredibly complex arrangement for three different Cabinet members and two others of equivalent rank, to come over into an embassy that had perhaps a staff of 100, at best 100 Americans, and maybe 100 Poles, as well. The embassy was still of the mind set that "Well we'll have to set up a schedule through the Polish government and tell them what we want to do and this kind of thing." That wasn't what the Cabinet members wanted and yet that was the sort of natural reaction of our embassy at that time. You know that particular embassy had never had to do its own scheduling and they certainly never had to schedule simultaneously five Cabinet level equivalent individuals plus spouses, plus two or three under secretaries from each department who wanted side meetings in addition to accompanying their principals. There was one under secretary for each of those departments.

So there were about eight schedules that all had to be managed at once. I ended up going over there with Secretary Yeutter's Press Secretary about two weeks in advance, to evaluate what needed to be done before the mission was take off. We got there and found that basically nothing was in place. We came back, made our report and about two days later I got back on the plane and went over there and stayed until the mission arrived and basically worked with them from six in the morning until midnight every day to help everyone get all these schedules in place. So that was quite an adventure but it all came off well in the end.

Q: What about...the Soviet Union has been a major consumer of our grain and corn. All of a sudden the Soviet Union broke up in ten different pieces or something like that so there is no set...I mean you have to deal with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, etc., etc. I would think these were the areas that were particularly needful of grain subsidies I mean grain. How did that work out?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well I also sort of became the Department of Agriculture's former Soviet Union desk officer, if you will, because I was managing programs under which we could do something about this situation either based on real needs or based on our desires to maintain markets and we could keep some flow of commodities going. The first thing, well even before the Soviet Union fully dissolved and shortly after Yeltsin made his famous stand in front of the Russian white house and basically became a de facto leader of Russia...

Q: This was when there was a coup against him and by essentially the old Communist hands and it failed.

GOLDTHWAIT: Right, but even before that we had had, or excuse me right after that we had a presidential mission lead by again Undersecretary of Agriculture Richard Crowder and he and I and some people that were recruited from the private sector went over to evaluate the agriculture situation in the country. It was October, the harvest was just completed and it had not been a very good harvest. Transportation channels were rather messed up and we concluded that indeed that there needed to be an allocation of sort of credit that would enable the Soviet Union's government that was still in place to cover the needs of all of these emerging countries that were sort of coming out of the woodwork and gradually becoming more and more independent from the Soviet Union which hadn't official declared their independence yet. So we decided that a major allocation of credit guarantees was in order. The Soviet Union had an excellent credit reputation although we saw that as a government it was pretty teetery at this point. So in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution from the standpoint of credit worthiness we thought the signature not only of the outgoing, as you will, Ministry of Agriculture from the Soviet Union but the ministers of agriculture from each of the emerging countries of the NIS (newly independent states) on the document which would basically guarantee by their governments repayment of the credit guarantee that was going to be made available. So we made the first of several major allocations of credit and food aid to these countries. That probably would have been, I can't remember the exact year, but it might have been around 1992, I want to say 1991 or '92.

The next thing that happened going along with the other situation that you mentioned which was the needs of some of the smaller countries. The following year probably we found that they all basically declared themselves independent and this, I think, would have been the summer of 1992. The U.S. government, of course, wanted to do something first to the standpoint of aid which was important to each of them but also from the stand point of helping them with what looks like it could be very real food needs in the various countries. So for pretty much every one of them except Russia, which having inherited the gold reserves and the Soviet Union was in much better shape, and this was at the very end of the fiscal year and there was absolutely no foreign assistance money left, everything had been spent since probably about August. Normally the only resources we had, which we could tap quickly were the food aid programs at the Department of Agriculture. We had a small reserve left under PL 480 Title I at that point and we had something called the Food for Progress program; but it really wasn't a program at that point in time. It was a mechanism for turning a PL 480 Title I loan into a grant to a foreign country. I read the legislation that described that particular program and I saw there was nothing in it, in the legislation, that tied it absolutely, you know to PL 480 Title I even though it had always been used in conjunction with Title I. I asked our counsel in the department why can't we simply use the resources that come out of the Commodity Credit Corporation and go out and buy commodities using the authority of Food for Progress and supply these as grants to these new governments without any need for them to have Title I allocations put on top of it. People got together and said, "You're right, we can do that." So we went and told the people at the White House and the State Department that we had the resources to provide foreign assistance to each one of these emerging countries that fiscal year.

We got the endorsement of the administration as you might imagine and I asked one of my staff members to get on the plane and go to each one of these countries, and these were again often times very junior people who had never negotiated agreements, some in only their second or third year of employment with the department in a couple of cases. It took them about a month to go out to all of these countries around the 5th of September. By the end of September we had signed food aid agreements with each of these countries. I thought it was nothing short of remarkable because often times it would take two or three months to negotiate and this was a streamlined version. So we were able to supply either Title I concessional loan or a grant for Food for Progress, you know \$5-\$10 million each, to each of those countries. That helped to address the real needs at meeting food requirements that winter.

The country that was probably in the worse shape was Armenia and with this presidential mission we had been to Armenia the year before and it was the only country where at the official banquet we weren't served a luxurious dinner, in fact we got mystery meat so we knew even then that they were worse off than the other countries. The Armenian government subsequently and I'm not sure that this is absolutely true but they subsequently came to us and told us that because of the allocation of food aid that perhaps in Yerevan up to 200 thousand people did not starve that winter. That may be an exaggeration but that's what they told us afterwards.

So we responded in both ways to the developments, both as continued providers of credit where would they justify it from the credit worthiness stand point which tended to be mainly Russia , and then food aid to the other countries. One of the results was this Food for Progress authority that I mentioned. As a result of this it became a separate and freestanding program on its own. It's still being used that way today and it's one of the two major food aid programs managed by Department of Agriculture.

Q: Chris, the climate essentially, really the whole country wanted to do something to make these viable states. I would think a great concern would be the Soviets have always had this problem of in their agricultural program I've heard the figure quoted of twenty-five or thirty percent of their grain and all is lost through inadequate storage or transportation and all. When you get the whole structure breaking down I mean all a sudden I would think that the delivery of the products would be of tremendous concern.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes. What we were basically doing because of those problems on the domestic side that I mentioned they were at that time already major buyers of U.S. agriculture commodities. What we were basically doing was continuing the flow of some portion of what they had been able to buy on a cash basis. On a credit basis we couldn't maintain the very same level but mechanisms for the importation and the distribution of imported grain were in much better shape and remained in better shape than the mechanisms for distributing what they could then grow, because what they produced internally could not go as far and got used up closer to where they produced it.

We had people who went over and monitored, we had people who went over and evaluated their transportation system and USDA has a transportation office that does that sort of thing in foreign countries, believe it or not.

Q: Did you find at least initially pretty good cooperation between the various called Stans but on these states? I mean did they realize they had to hang together or hang separately?

GOLDTHWAIT: Where it came to allowing the transportation through one to another because they were all getting subsidized they all did cooperate. I know I can't comment on that cooperation otherwise. I know there have been tensions with the Azerbaijanis for example. But where grain delivery were concerned and other commodities they tended to cooperate.

Q: Then this obviously must have, this whole break down of the Soviet system must have impacted very heavily on your time and your work. Was this sort of the main thing you were doing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, no, I was spending a lot of time on this but I had a lot of other things going on at the same time. Just sort of in terms of doing routine management of the programs, fiscal 1992, was probably a record year for credit guarantees, several billion dollars worth and that only maybe 1.5 billion was for performance of the FSU; so there was heavy workload for the programs other places as well.

During the first years of the Clinton administration I was doing a lot of things that normally other people in the agency might have done for the department. I made a few notes here, actually I'm not going to consider it but going back through them I see that in 1992 and 1994 I testified at seven Congressional hearings in addition to the budget hearings and we also, coming up to 1994, had a role in the U.S. response to the Mexican peso crisis. Again, Mexico which had been a key export market and which had been a user of our credit guarantee program suddenly saw its economy collapsing; it saw the value of the peso tumbling tremendously. There was enormous pressure from the agricultural community for making credit available to them and helping maintain the flow of commodities and help maintain for them as well as exports of the particular corn for tortillas, which was a real staple for the entire population.

So I took a couple of my colleagues and we went down probably just about a month after the crisis hit and we had a round of meetings with various of the ministries. We gathered a lot of information, first of all about their true needs but also about the reform efforts that had to be undertaken almost immediately, very, very quickly by the Mexican government. What we found was that all of the senior people in the ministries who had mismanaged the thing were gone and there was a whole new cadre of young people, people in their thirties and even late twenties who had been put in to replace them; folks who had gone to Harvard and Yale business schools. They were extremely knowledgeable and everybody had work experience; some of them not a great deal but they were doing all the right things. So we were able to come back and we were able to explain what the reforms were and they had been put in place and the reality is we allocated half a billion dollars in credit and commodities moved accordingly in response to the crisis. That was actually a larger amount than we had been using and repaid early; normally it was a three-year payment period so that they would pay off the loan in three years.

Q: This was a very exciting time for you wasn't it?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, yes, I would say that at this time the General Sales Manager job was probably one of the most fun jobs in the U.S. government.

Q: So then what happened? After that Mrs. Lincoln how was the rest of the play?

GOLDTHWAIT: Let me look at my little notes. I remained as General Sales Manager for an unusually long period of time.

Q: Usually this is a political job?

GOLDTHWAIT: It's usually a political job and I was the first career person to be put in the job. The sort of quid pro quo, if you will of that was that having gone to the extra effort and this was due to Secretary Espy's efforts and then undersecretary during that time, Gene Moos. During that time they had to go to the White House and they had to make a very strong argument in favor of putting a career person in this job. The quid pro quo was that I basically had to stay there and give up any thought of another overseas assignment through most of the Clinton administration because having gone through all that effort they were satisfied in the job I was doing for them they didn't want me to leave.

But I was doing a number of other things during that time. During a lot of the first two years of the Clinton administration I was often the acting administrator for FAS. There was no administrator until about two years after the new administration came in. There was one of the other assistant administrators who had been designated as acting administrator but he was the person who was in charge of trade negotiations and this was during a critical period in the Uruguay Rounds. He was gone about half the time or tied up so much with trade negotiations that it left for me to basically run the agency. So I was spending a lot of time that way.

Let's see, what else here? There was the trip to China that I went on with Secretary Espy and Undersecretary Moos. I took over one little tiny aspect of trade negotiations, which was very technical, which was resolution of the TCK wheat issue.

Q: The what?

GOLDTHWAIT: TCK wheat issue. TCK is a fungus that grows on white wheat that is produced in the Pacific Northwest and the Chinese back in the '70s had banned the import of this particular quality of U.S. wheat. This had been a long standing thorn in the side of the wheat growers and the growing conditions in China are such that this particular fungus can't grow and it can't survive in Chinese growing regions, so it doesn't really pose a threat to the Chinese food production. But the Chinese, and you could see their point of view that they are so dependent about their enormous population on food production, said they weren't going to take any particular chances. So on this visit the Chinese I think were pleased that a Secretary from a new administration had come over and they wanted to make a gesture. So they said, "We will negotiate an end to the TCK issue with you." I was asked to chair the U.S. side of those negotiations. We met for I guess six or seven years and the Chinese basically would just not budge. We came to understand that what we had to do was develop a fallback position for them. Something that they could point to and say at the end of the day that this is why we have come convinced that we can lift the ban on this issue. As these negotiations developed, we saw that this would probably be a last resort concession, and it was. The very, very last thing that they agreed on in not bilateral negotiations but in terms of U.S. demands for their WTO accession and in fact that's how it turned out.

But we met with them for about twice a year, once in Beijing and once in Washington. One time it was in Portland. Most of it hinged on the development of a sort of comfort package for them, developing a pest risk analysis which is the standard mechanism that scientists use in evaluating whether a particular test proves it's a real risk to a crop in a particular growing environment. So we developed an extremely sophisticated pest risk analysis, provided it to them and continued to show up at negotiations until finally in the context that you've got a WTO accession they will concede. I believe that was actually not done until after 2000. But I do believe that they have actually imported some quantities of Western White Wheat.

Q: It would make great sense. I mean...

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh yes.

Q: You know it's produced right on the shipping lane to China.

GOLDTHWAIT: And this particular wheat is good for a noodle manufacture and it is the kind of thing that they go on. So I think the trade is going to reestablish itself, if it hasn't already.

Another thing I did during the rest of my time up until 1996 was work on the Farm Bill for 1996. The Secretary decided that we were going to have a very aggressive Administration position on the farm bill and to set up one task force within the department with people all over the department participating, for each of the different titles of the Farm Bill. I chaired the title that had to do with trade and we met very intensively twice a week I think, put together our chapter in what was called the Green Book. I continued to work and my colleagues went to the agricultural affairs people and the staff on the Congressional committees of the Senate and House side and that particular Farm Bill title was the only one of the administration's proposals that was accepted pretty much in toto. So I took the credit and satisfaction in that.

Also in I think it was 1996 we had the first of several Russian poultry crises and basically the Russians had banned the import of U.S. poultry. As Russia deteriorated, and exports deteriorated, and income deteriorated, about the only food that the Russian consumers could afford was what they called Bush legs after the first President Bush. That was when the trade first began. But the trade really moved after President Bush George H.B., was no longer there. It became quite a thorn in the side of the Russian poultry producers such as they were in the mid-'90s. They trumped up some rationale based on sanitary concerns for banning imports of poultry. We basically put together a working committee. Under Secretary Gus Schumacher, myself, the Secretary, a couple people in USDA, and one of my FAS colleagues John Reddington. We worked directly with Vice President Gore's office in order to get this resolved and Leon Fuerth, his international affairs advisor.

The reason the White House connection was critical was because of the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission, which meant that the Vice President had a personal line to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. We worked this in a variety of levels. We worked this on the technical level with technical USDA agencies providing the information that showed the sanitary concerns were not well founded. We worked it at a sort of intermediate political level through the embassy and then ultimately when we had impasse and we could not get beyond we would work it through the Vice President's office and he would call the Prime Minister. My particular role in this was to keep the Vice President's office informed about how all the technical negotiations were doing as well as to do the overall briefing for the poultry trade and for the Congressional committees. And coordination. The real nuts and bolts was the really tough work if you will. The administrators of two technical agencies in USDA, the US poultry companies and John Reddington had the toughest part.Q: This is Tape 3, Side 1, with Chris Goldthwait. Yeah?

GOLDTHWAIT: So they really had to make sure the science was impeccable and up to any challenge. So they were doing that and we eventually got it resolved and what has sort of been the subsequent history is that every time the imports get to a really difficult stage from the standpoint of the Russians they would find a rationale to cut them off and we would have to go through a smaller version of this process all over again. There have been I think probably two or three subsequent iterations of this including one within the past couple of years. But they generally get resolved and they are generally only a temporary interruption in trade.

Q: During the time you were doing this had the genetically modified food business which sets off all sets of alarms in Europe sort of Franken food, had that arisen yet?

GOLDTHWAIT: In the early to mid-'90s it was just starting and the use of those improved food varieties has really been in the mid-'90s and since the turning of the decade.

Q: So this wasn't something, I mean this can get to be a major irritant? Europeans, I mean, the public is very sensitive about this and, of course, the producers within Europe are delighted because this keeps American products from being competitive.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, that's true, it's a major hassle. The closest I came to direct involvement with it was in the case of a couple foods aid shipments we were sending to southern African countries where they were refused entry because the products were GMO based. Just as an aside last fall I did a consulting job where I learned a lot more about the process for approving these varieties than I had ever known before and I became convinced even more that it's just a slam dunk to use them because what they do is prevent the use of any pesticides which are much more damaging to the environment and potentially much more harmful to animals, the wild life you name it than actually the GMO's.

A couple of things grew out of the first poultry crisis. One was that U.S. poultry industry undertook something that was extremely unusual as part of the effort to resolve this and I take a bit of credit for convincing them to do this. I found a way to use one of the food aid programs to put up some resources to finance it. But they agreed to undertake the construction of a modern American style poultry production facility in the former Soviet Union, in Russia and to finance part of it themselves. They put up \$5 million and I think I found \$10 million and monetized it through a food aid program. So basically over a process of about four years and it was very difficult to keep all of these, about a dozen of them, competitive U.S. poultry producers, I guess five or six of them were involved in the Russia trade so the ones who were involved in this project not perhaps the full dozen. But to keep them all focused, to keep them all in sync, to keep them all cooperating and to convince them that it was in their interest to demonstrate that Russians could produce poultry efficiently as well as relying on the import trade.

What has happened is the facilities went into production in about the year 2000 and it is still operating. I believe that the U.S. poultry industry has now sold out their shares in it and what has interestingly happened is that while they managed to make a go of it another US group who happens to be today my largest consulting client went and bought into another old defunct Russian poultry operation, got it up and running, overtook the one that the one U.S. poultry industry was managing in terms of productivity and output became the largest in Russia. We only sold my client's interest in that about a month ago, well in December, it's been about two months.

Q: Now what has this done to the poultry exports in the U.S. to Russia?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well a very interesting thing. These facilities are producing mainly whole birds and oven ready products and the market is the growing middle class in Russia; the upper class for income groups is for the whole birds. The business with the chicken legs still continues and caters to people in Russia who are low income. So you have this bifurcation involving trade and imports of cheap products that go to the lower income groups and the Russian production is going to a market that didn't exist in the early '90s. For the whole birds, it was pretty much depressed in the early '90s.

Q: It's interesting where chicken now has become sort of rather inexpensive meat. I think there was a book that came out in the 1930s or so called Chicken Every Sunday. This was pretty hot stuff if the families could have a chicken on Sunday. So the rise and fall of the use of chicken is being now considered not an expensive food.

GOLDTHWAIT: No, although the reason the Bush legs or the chicken legs are so inexpensive is, and that they went in the Soviet Union, is because the American market increasingly wants the more expensive boneless breasts; we tend to not want drumsticks so much here. So they are almost a byproduct for the big producers and they go to the export trade.

Q: Chris you left in '99 didn't you?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes.

Q: This was a very productive period for you.

GOLDTHWAIT: It was. In fact there are just a couple more things that were going on that I should describe. The other thing that grew out of the poultry crisis was an agricultural committee as part of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission and I actually ended up being the point of contact. The chair was the Secretary of Agriculture but I was the point of contact which meant that I was the person who organized it and I had a Russian counterpart and we would get together in advance of the actual commission meetings which were held twice a year, once in Moscow and once in Washington and we would manage the work of the committee. Of course the Russian desire here was to tap into as much agriculture expertise as they could get from the United States to redevelop their agriculture. We didn't have much in the way of resources but we did what we could and, of course, from our side, wanted to improve the trade climate and prevent things like the reoccurrence of the poultry crisis. Anyway that process went on and probably had some modest accomplishments. The big success was the American industry's poultry process, which we put under the rubric of the committee.

Another thing I was doing at this time had to do with some of the management initiatives that the Clinton administration brought in when it took office. It decided that government agencies would have what they called partnership councils which are basically committees, the membership of which is partly agency management but also representatives of unions that exist in agencies. In the Foreign Agriculture Service we established one that had three components. It had representatives of management and I became the chief representative, the Administrator's representative on the committee and there were representatives of two unions, one representing our civil service employees and one representing our Foreign Service employees, AFSA (American Foreign Service Association).

I had mentioned earlier this tension that existed within the agency that first manifested itself as a racial tension. Really it became much clearer that the real issues, not to say there wasn't racial bias, but the real issues went back to the dictum by an earlier Administrator in the early 1980's who had said, "Civil service individuals were not to be promoted beyond GS-14, all the higher career jobs will be staffed by foreign service personnel." This, as I say, manifested itself to some degree in the demographics of a lot of the civil service personnel, a lot more of the civil service personnel being minority individuals. But I think as we got over these one or two racial incidents and as this partnership council was being established it was clear that the real division within the agency was Foreign Service/Civil Service; and there is, of course, in the State Department some tension as well. I imagine there is in each of the other foreign affairs agencies to a degree. Ours may have been the worse of that particular moment in time. But the partnership council decided that as its chief function it would undertake to resolve the issues between civil service and Foreign Service. The two unions in the partnership council did not trust each other as far as they could see. They were initially at each other's throats and they decided that I should chair the partnership council, which I did up until I left in 1999. I was the only one both sides trusted even though I was a Foreign Service Officer. We set up a task force to study the problem and come back to us with recommendations. The task force was comprised of representatives of both of the unions and management, so all three components. They came back with a very well thought out set of about 30 recommendations for personnel changes in the agency and over a period of three years the partnership council worked through them, and agency management implemented many of them.

One of the changes, just for example, first of all we got rid of this...we had already gotten rid of the rule that said only Foreign Service people could rise. But it there was still a heavy tendency for Foreign Service personnel to get most of the senior jobs because the overseas grade structure was higher than Washington grade structure and you had to have a place of equal grade for returning Foreign Service officers to have tours in Washington. Well, one of the things we did was to lengthen the period of time that our Foreign Service personnel spent overseas so that there would be less pressure. One of the things that we did was say that all senior managers are going to, not just Foreign Service managers, are going to rotate after a certain number of years in a particular job so that you get more opportunity for everyone to move around and have different responsibilities, develop different skill sets and be more competitive for the higher positions in the agency.

So a whole series of things like that. Not everything was adopted. Tensions remained to a degree but I think we succeeded in dissipating them and the agency is now not poisoned by this divide as it was. Of course the ironic thing is that as the decisions about the Foreign Service officers, for example needing to spend more of their time overseas the great exception in this was myself. So here I was making this process that was trying to solve a problem and reform the process and yet because I was in this job that was normally a politically appointee's I was sort of frozen in place and couldn't go overseas until my political bosses agreed. The truth of the matter was that during this initial period at least up until the point where I went overseas there wasn't anybody else around who really had the confidence of both the unions. So it was rather an unusual situation. Then by that time it was also recognized that there was a time when I would go back overseas and that this was sort of an exception to the rule that folks tolerated.

Let's see if I've left out any other things. Two or three more things I should probably mention. There was another situation you may recall you may recall it was very much like the Mexican peso crisis and that was the East Asian financial crisis. Again, our trade with a number of countries was very, very desperately threatened, for example with South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. The ones who imported the most from the U.S. were Indonesia and South Korea in particular they were taking an awful lot of U.S. cotton. Korea was taking feed grains and Indonesia some feed grains and Malaysia a fair amount of wheat. Taiwan and Malaysia a bit of cotton, a bit of feed grains for their poultry and their textile industries. There were really two big threats here.

One was that they would be unable, particularly on the industrial side, to provide raw materials they really needed to get their economies back in shape to avoid a real depression. Then two, of course, our real interest was to maintain our exports. So again there was tremendous pressure for us to use the credit guarantee program. So I did the same thing we had done in Mexico. I took a couple of my colleagues and went over to all four of those countries. We visited with people in banks and finance ministries and people in the trade, and generally tried to do the best evaluation that we could. You may remember that this took place as the crisis hit right around Christmas time, shortly before Christmas. We took our mission I think really very, very early in January and my undersecretary at the time, Gus Schumacher, coined the term that while the Australians who screamed bloody murder when we eventually did make credit allocations, they hated it because they thought they saw a chance to capture the grain market in Indonesia particular. And our use of credit kept the market for us. Once they started screaming my undersecretary said, "Well, while the Aussies were asleep on the beach Chris was sleepless in Seoul." Anyway, Gus has a way with words at times.

We came back and we made our report and we again recommended that because the reforms had already been put into place we could go forward with some credit guarantee allocations for Korea. Not as large as what we had done in Mexico. The Koreans by that time really stopped using the credit guarantee program. They dropped in use from \$500-600 million a year down to about \$150. But they needed it now and so we allocated I think \$500 million for Korea largely for feed grains and cotton, a little bit for some other commodities. Again all of these, as those commodities were covered, all of these allocations were repaid on time. They didn't repay them early the way the Mexicans had at that time. We made smaller allocations for the other countries, again keeping our markets, and with no defaults.

Let's see what else. I said that we made a number of allocations of credit or food aid to Russia through the 1990s. There were three or four of them and one of the ones that was well known I think was probably the second credit allocation, which became really the main deliverable at President Clinton's Vancouver summit with Boris Yeltsin. It was a \$700 million allocation.

The last of these initiatives was a food aid initiative for \$1 billion that I negotiated in December of 1998. By this time the Russian financial crisis had hit and there was just no way we could declare them credit worthy. I think we had made an initial food aid allocation to them for a smaller amount perhaps in 1997, I can't remember exactly what year. But we began to hear rumblings that they really wanted another allocation, I suppose because the harvest had not been good, their agriculture was floundering.

This turned out to be the most difficult negotiation that I ever had to undertake. The Chinese and the Russians, of course, are very famous for being difficult negotiators and I had gone through numerous negotiations with them before. But this time the difficulty was not the Russians, the difficulty was the U.S. government. I took a small team, three or four of us, people who had worked closely with me on Russia, over to Moscow. Initially we went on what was supposed to be just a three-day visit to evaluate. The Russians had promised to provide to us a host of data that would demonstrate their need and we would evaluate that data and bring it back. Well Friday came along and we called back and said, "Yeah, they've done a pretty good job of convincing us." We were asked to stay over the weekend, tell them that we would sit down with them on Monday and we would be willing to start negotiations of a credit package. So we sent our clothes to the hotel laundry and did that pretty much every day for the next week while this negotiation dragged out. We received a cable over the weekend, waiting for us when the embassy opened Monday morning. We reviewed it with Ambassador Collins; Jim Collins was the ambassador then, and sat down with the Russians. My counterpart in the negotiation was the Deputy Prime Minister who oversaw the Ministry of Agriculture and one or two other ministries, Russians. This was typical of Soviet governments and is also typical of African governments; they tend to have many, many different ministries. They have about five deputy prime ministers that oversee all of them.

We laid out the terms and condition under which we would be willing to undertake the allocation of credit guarantees. We talked back and forth, there were a couple of things they didn't like but by the end of the day we had reached agreement in principal and had arranged to come back the next morning and have the signing ceremony. Overnight we received a cable. The cable said, "In addition to the terms and conditions the Russian side told us they agreed to yesterday, you need to approach them and ask the to agree to these additional points." In my view, that is the most unscrupulous thing that you can do in negotiations. You can't reach agreement on the basis of your full instructions and then go in and ask for more. I went in and I apologized to my counterpart and said, "I'm very sorry but we've received some additional information and need to ask for these additional things." Well the things that we were being asked for at this point really had nothing to do really with the credit package. They were two other unrelated issues that had arisen in context with the aid that we were providing to Russia at this time.

The Russians somewhat to my surprise grumbled and gripped and went away, met among themselves, came back and said, "OK, we'll agree." The next day the same thing happened and we went through the same process and the Russians agreed. The next day, this would have been Thursday by now, the same thing happened. The Deputy Prime Minister at this point was outraged and he pounded the table with his hand and he said, "We are not Ethiopia," and he walked out. I went back to the embassy, we met with Ambassador Collins, we talked informally with one or two of the Russian counterparts with whom I had strong personal relationships by now, that had developed over the years and tried to sound them out a little bit on what we might have to do and whether in fact if we could get the latest conditions withdrawn would they still agree to what they had agreed to the day before. The idea was, well more or less, yes. Well, I called my under secretary when Washington opened and told him that basically the Russians had finally walked away, that this was the most humiliating situation that our team, our negotiating team had ever been put in, in terms of having to do this kind of thing.

What we had by then learned was that what was happening was that the U.S. AID mission director kind of had his own agenda and was calling back to AID and calling back to people that he knew at the National Security Council and at State and getting these new conditions added. I said to Gus, our under secretary, "Unless those conditions are withdrawn I'm coming home on the plane tomorrow. I'm not going to make another effort to try to push the Russians on this latest set of things even if they were willing to see me again which they probably won't". He said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, let me talk to the secretary." Ten minutes later he called back from the secretary's office, Dan Glickman, and the secretary said, "Well I will call the NSC right now and we will have a meeting. If I have to go over there myself we will get this resolved."

So basically the associate administrator from FAS, Tim Galvin went over and sat down with the people at NSC, they got people from State and AID there, they went over the situation, agreed to withdraw the last set of conditions and sent out a cable that said that if the Russians would agree to the previous set of conditions we would sign. I called my personal contact, told him that we had gotten the latest terms of conditions withdrawn and asked him to see if we couldn't go ahead and have an agreement. So we did and we signed. After having sent my clothes to the hotel laundry everyday for about seven days as I had stayed there about ten days instead of three, I came home. That was that and one of the things we insisted on was heavy monitoring to prevent the food aid from going into the wrong channels because it was supposed to go to orphanages, old age homes and other institutions for needy people. Believe it or not the Russians actually did it, the General Accountability Office went over about two years later and did an audit while the last of it was being distributed and said they couldn't find any evidence that any of it had gone astray.

That was the last of the big negotiations with the Russians. Actually, their economy began to turn around fairly shortly thereafter. Their agriculture finally shook out and now they are much more self-sufficient and even export a little bit of grain.

Q: I'm looking at the...

GOLDTHWAIT: About one more little thing that we did before I left for Chad and then I should probably talk some about my experience as the Ambassador in Chad.

Q: OK, then why don't we talk about next time Chad and all that?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yeah, OK.

Q: OK, today is the 5th of February 2008. Chris, was there anything else you wanted to talk about before we moved to Chad?

GOLDTHWAIT: I might just mention one very interesting initiative that came about very shortly before I left for Chad, like six or eight months before hand. This was an effort to take enormous quantities of wheat out of the country as food aid. It was a very ample crop that year and the Secretary of Agriculture decided that using some of the authority of the Commodity Credit Corporation he could buy wheat and give it to needy countries under the so-called Section 416B program. That's a particular paragraph in the legislation governing the credit corporation. So I got a call from his office I guess it was on a Friday and I was asked to go over and see the Under Secretary. So the next morning on Saturday we trooped over to the white House and announced this along with the head of AID, announced this enormous give away to needy countries of wheat. I mention that because it was sort of the last major commodity disposal effort by the U.S. government as far as I know because it had the effect not just of helping people who actually did need food in some parts of the world. But as it went on and particularly after I was no longer on the scene it got a bit out of hand and it's one of the reasons why in the current Doha round countries like Brazil and Argentina and the Australians and one or two others are very, very anxious to put new disciplines on food aid.

Q: Yeah, I can imagine I mean this is a decision by the Secretary of Agriculture and without the Canadians, the Argentineans, the Australians and I guess the EU. I mean hell you are cutting them off at the knees.

GOLDTHWAIT: That was certainly the way they looked at it and within a certain bound there was, I think, useful validity for increasing food aid and I worked to try and kind of manage it during that last few months that I was on the scene. But I think after a year or so it got out of hand and got too big and probably did have some detrimental impact on commercial exports. And there were some domestic political overtones in the program as well.

Q: Was there, I mean I can understand your sending wheat to Bangladesh, fine I mean that's not...they need it and they don't have the money but I would think that if you've got a program like this with masses amounts of wheat there will be leakages so they would all of a sudden end up being sold in Finland or something where they've got the money to pay commercial rates and all that. Was this happening?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, there was probably some leakage and there was probably also...there were some donations to countries like Indonesia, which are major, commercial buyers and it's very hard to ensure that all you give them is going to be additional to what they would otherwise purchase. So in that sense, and that's a perpetual problem with food aid even in smaller allocations. But that's the kind of thing that was getting us out again on thin ice.

Q: I mean just to get a feel for the bureaucratic business was somebody saying when this decision is made say well what about sort of the diplomatic side of things?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, it was a time when there was a great effort on the part of the administration to do something for farmers and the idea was developed very quickly and very quietly very quietly among a few people in USDA and the White House. So I don't believe diplomatic considerations weighed very heavily.

Q: OK, well let's come to you going to Chad. Here you are a member of the Foreign Agricultural Service. In the first place were you the only ambassador ever named out of this or had there been others?

GOLDTHWAIT: I was the first. I like to say that even middle-aged males can break glass ceilings but since then there have been two others. I don't believe, well the third one I think is just back, Suzanne Hale. The other was Mattie Sharpless. Mattie went to Central African Republic about a year after I went to Chad and Suzanne went to somewhere in the South Pacific a couple years later. I don't believe there is currently any FAS ambassador. There may be someone under consideration, I don't know.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well a number of people in the other foreign affairs agencies from which ambassadors had not traditionally come, including USDA, were thinking that it might be good for their own parts of the Foreign Service and I know that as early as probably 1995 my Under Secretary started writing letters to the Director General suggesting that someone be selected from the Foreign Agricultural Service. Initially there wasn't really much response and even at that point I think I was the person who the Under Secretary had in mind to suggest. But a couple years later we actually started getting requests from the State Department to send a nomination or to send a name for the D committee to consider. In 1998 the first individual from the Foreign Commercial Service was taken as ambassador. He went out to Ivory Coast, as I recall.

Q: Where was it?

GOLDTHWAIT: Ivory Coast.

Q: Ivory Coast.

GOLDTHWAIT: The next year after my name had gone over about three times I was selected for Chad.

Q: OK, you were in Chad from when to when?

GOLDTHWAIT: I got there in about October of 1999 and I came back in January of 2004.

Q: That's a long, long time particularly going through a change in administration. I guess it also shows the priority Chad had on the sort of political horizon.

GOLDTHWAIT: Well there was a joke after the election about hanging chad. Karen Harris, the State Secretary in Florida, was shown answering a phone call and a voice on the other side said, "Congratulations your ambassadorship has come through. That's the good news, the bad is its Chad."

Q: The joke being that in the Florida county the ballots in 2000 chads were a sort of a paper flap that came down and is this a vote or not a vote. It became quite an important issue. Did you run into any problem with confirmation?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, none at all. We went up several of us as a panel and the person who was sort of the star of our panel, if you will, was Ambassador Johnny Carson who was heading out to Kenya. That country had a good bit more visibility than any of our other countries. We each got a couple questions but the real focus was on Kenya more than it was on the other countries.

Q: How well were you briefed and prepared sort of reading into Chad before you went there?

GOLDTHWAIT: The desk put together a briefing book for me. It was very good, very useful so I was able to read in, I was able to go over and read some of the recent cable traffic and things like that. So I had a pretty good idea of what the situation was. I had had a lot of experience testifying before Congress as a General Sales Manager so I wasn't really too worried about the confirmation hearing.

Q: What were American interests in Chad would you say when you went out there?

GOLDTHWAIT: When I went out the main thing that was front and center was the development of the oil project in southern Chad. The issue of the day was whether the World Bank would, in fact, make its loan to the Chadian government to pay for its share of the construction pipeline that would go from southern Chad to the Cameroonian coast. This was about a \$500 million loan but it was critical to the project for a number of reasons. First of all it would give the Chadians some ownership and some additional revenue as fees for the use of the pipeline. But more importantly Exxon Mobile the lead company, felt that they needed the involvement of the World Bank as a kind of an extra security measure, if you will, to be sure that the Chadian government would uphold its end of the deal and to just add general visibility and assurance to the project.

Q: The Cold War was well over by this time. Were there any security concerns about Chad?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well there were general concerns. At that time, obviously in contrast to today, Chad was a kind of an island of stability in the region. There was Qadhafi to the north, the Sudanese with their still on-going civil war to the east...

Q: This is the North-South War?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, not Darfur which came later and began about a year before I left Chad. There was a coup in the Central African Republic just a couple of years after I got to Chad and so it was less stable. There were various communal problems in Nigeria as well as the sporadic violence in the oil-producing region of the Niger delta, which has if anything has gotten worse. So Chad for the moment was quiet so there was a good bit of concern about stability in the region but not specific to Chad, less specific to Chad.

Q: Was there sort of an informal acceptance of the fact that Chad was within the purview of the French military protection and influence and all of that or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: There was in fact and it put not only myself but I think it put every American ambassador who goes into Chad or Niger or one of these other countries in a little bit of an awkward situation. We don't tend to give a lot of foreign assistance to these countries. In fact the AID mission in Chad had closed just as my predecessor was arriving and that made for a very, very rough tour for him. But people in the country would still look to the United States to be rather front and center but we didn't have the resources in country that the French had and we were always a little bit out of the lime light.

Q: Before you went out were you talking to American oil people or business people? I mean were these contacts you were making?

GOLDTHWAIT: I talked to some of the Exxon Mobile people here in Washington before going out and I very quickly made the acquaintance of the director of the project when I got to N'Djamena. The project was not yet really under construction. Everybody was set to begin it, people were assuming that the World Bank loan would in fact come through, which it did about three months or so after I got to country...

Q: And was agriculture important in Chad?

Yes, there was a very important agriculture element. It's the one country in the Sahel belt that is more or less food self-sufficient. We do in fact provide a very small amount of food aid to Chad on an on-going basis but it is pretty much self-sufficient. Now we provide more food aid aimed at Darfur refugees but agriculture and herding, livestock, employ perhaps 70 percent, 80 percent of the population and the southern part of the country is actually fairly productive and has about the same amount of rainfall as Washington, DC.

Q: I thought in some ways herding is almost counter productive looking at practically the people...this is wealth so you don't use your cattle you might say as a food or milk element but more as a prestige element and it also eats up grain. How did this...?

GOLDTHWAIT: The herding is almost entirely nomadic and it's all pasture. They are not grain fed by any means. But you are correct, there is reluctance on the part of many of the nomads to slaughter their livestock. The pattern is for them to sell a few animals a year just so that they would have a little bit of cash income because otherwise they would have none. So they might sell three or four head of cattle or a camel or two if there are cattle and camels. The main food animals are sheep and goats and so there is more trade and slaughter of sheep and goats.

Q: What were you hearing about the ruler the president for life or what is his title?

GOLDTHWAIT: I think today you can say that he is president for life. This is one of the things that made the situation in country a bit more stable when I was there. He was just about to run for his second term, that election took place actually while I was still there probably about mid-way through my tour. So there was the illusion and people took it a little bit more strongly, that maybe there would be some progress in a democratic direction. However, about two years after I left, i.e., two years ago, the president had the constitution amended so that he could run for a third term which was not permitted under the constitution as it was written when I arrived in the country. That alienated even people within his own power base, which is why the problems were in Chad last week and in fact one of the rebel factions, and there are two or three different factions fighting the government now, one of them is lead by fellow members of the same ethnic group as the president who are actually a pair of brothers. One of them headed the cotton monopoly while I was in country and the other was the government's person in the negotiations on the oil project with Exxon Mobile so I know those folks. They are very sophisticated gentlemen and they are now up in arms.

Q: In the first place the president's name is?

GOLDTHWAIT: Idriss Deby.

Q: D-E...?

GOLDTHWAIT: B-Y.

Q: B-Y. What were you getting as you were going out there about him as a personality and his method of ruling?

GOLDTHWAIT: There were kind of two schools of thought and I encountered this among my colleagues in the embassy when I got there. Some wanted to be give him the benefit of the doubt and watch and try to encourage him to move in a more democratic direction. There were others who tended to be with the so-called democratic opposition in country who were dead set against him and with whom he had no credibility even then. This gets to one of the interesting factors in Chad, which is the way in which the country is divided north, and south in terms of many, many things. There is a religious divide between the Muslim north and the Christian south; the country is about 55 percent Muslim and about 40 percent Christian. There is an educational divide; the French educated the southerners and the educational system is much stronger in the south than in the north. There is an ethnic divide; the northerners tend to be from a different language family and other different ethnicities. They almost don't consider themselves black sometimes. They consider themselves as having great affinities with the Arabic world. The southerners tend to be darker and they tend to be from the various Bantu tribal groups; so you would have these ethnic divides. You have going back historically a divide between slave traders from the north and immigrants from the south. So you would have all of these and, of course, you would have a geographical divide; the southerners are farmers and the northerners are pastoralists. So you have all of these divides that sort of cut across the middle of the country and N'Djamena is kind of where they all come together. In fact you have this series of divisions across most of the Sahelian countries.

Q: Well you got out there and you said it was...?

GOLDTHWAIT: In October of '99.

Q: In October. In the first place, what sort of an embassy did you have?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was certainly on the small side. We had a large number of Chadian employees because we employed all of our guards, drivers and grounds men and people like that directly rather than through contractors. But we had what when I got there? We had about twenty-two or twenty-three Americans including our Marine detachment. That had actually grown to about thirty-three or thirty-four by the time I left four years later.

Q: Who was your DCM and how was he or she chosen?

GOLDTHWAIT: The DCM when I arrived was Paul Rowe who I believe is still in the service. He had been selected and or short-listed, shall we say, by the department and was suggested to me. I met with him and he went out to post about a month before I did or maybe two months. I was able to meet with him a couple of times here before he left and satisfied myself that we would work well together and that was the process.

Q: Did you go out with the family?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I'm single so I went out by myself and that's both easier and harder in a country like Chad. Easier in a sense that you are not concerned about the family all the time but harder in the sense that obviously you don't have the on the spot support, particularly in entertaining and things like that, but that's...

Q: With entertaining quite often when the ambassador is single male or female, sort of the DCMs wife will fill in or a political officer depending on the agenda or something. Did you usually do this?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not really. I have always done a lot of entertaining myself just personally and then also business entertaining. I had an excellent staff in the house, the staff was four people, the house was immediately next to the embassy in the same compound so if I needed to run over and make sure things were in hand for a lunch or a dinner or a reception. But the first thing I did when I got off the plane was interviewing a cook. He was waiting at the house when I got there and he turned out to be an excellent cook. The major domo in the house who had been there for years and years and years and I could simply say tonight, or not tonight I would give him a few days warning, but Thursday night we will have a reception for 40 people. The cook would bring me a list of what he proposed to serve and I would say, "Fine" and he would shop. He would have a couple of other people come in to help with the service and I would virtually have to do nothing.

Q: All right let's talk about...OK you arrive and was the presentation of credentials a ceremony or was it pro forma? How did you find it?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was a ceremony. We pushed the Chadians to present my credentials very quickly because there was a trip that Exxon Mobil was planning down to the oil fields and I very much wanted to be able to participate in that visit and get familiar on the spot with the biggest American interest in the country right away. It was an opportunity I didn't want to let go. The Chadians, again I think partly because of the American role in the oil project, were very cooperative and I think it was three or four days when I was able to present my credentials, the president received me. We had a brief ceremony with some photographs and things like that. He was quite cordial.

Q: What was your initial impression of Deby?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well he is I think very capable and very charming. He, I learned this more over time, is not a committed democrat obviously and I think he already had limits in his own mind in terms of how far he was going to allow the country to liberalize. There is another fundamental reason why democracy is very difficult in countries like Chad. It's because the government basically controls all the economic resources in the country and you don't have anybody who has the basis to build a real political party that's truly oppositional. But I think the president is a capable man. The government as a whole is less capable. One of the interesting things is that while it was very centrally run it nonetheless imposed a rather light burden on the population simply because it didn't have the resources to have a heavy presence throughout the country.

Q: What was your impression of where the oil was being exploited and how Exxon Mobil was dealing with this?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the oil was in the southern part of the country maybe fifty to seventy-five miles north of the border with the CAR. There is oil in other parts of the country as well, smaller deposits that may or may not be exploited at some point. But the largest deposit, the proven reserves, is in that southern central part of the country. Exxon Mobil I thought was doing absolutely everything as impeccably as they could. They claimed and I still believe this is the case, that the project was developed with the same care for the environment and the local population that would have been the case had they been doing it in North America or Europe and you could see that they were very careful to not have any more of a footprint than they had to. So I was quite impressed by the way the project was going. Nonetheless, it was very strongly opposed by environmental groups and they had a lot of influence even with our own government and it was a very close call in that vote a couple months after I had gotten to post, as to whether or not the U.S. was actually was going to vote in favor of the World Bank loan. There was a very strong risk of that we might abstain and if we abstained and a couple of other countries abstained then a couple countries that opposed it might have carried the day.

Q: What was the reason for the reluctance?

GOLDTHWAIT: On this side of the Atlantic I think it was really the influence of the environmental groups and I think in Chad the opposition really came...it was more of a north-south thing. People that I described, southerners, I described a while ago, simply didn't trust government. It preferred to defer the project until that time in the distant future when a southerner might be in charge.

Q: I don't know if the problems that Nigeria has had of the oil resources in the Delta were apparently not much money is getting to the people who live there. Was oil coming out of a populated area or what?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was a well it was one of the more populated areas in the sense that as you go from north to south you have an increasing density of population in Chad. The southern areas are where you have a heavier rainy season, which naturally supported farming and therefore a larger population. But it was, I don't think in the sense, by any means what you have over in Nigeria. You have a few towns but they're not the largest cities in the country. From the beginning there was an effort both by the World Bank and the Chadian government, to a degree, to avoid the mistakes of the Nigerians and to be sure there were some development projects that were aimed at the region. So you had more positive impact than has been the case in Nigeria.

Q: Well as we have been talking today and in the last week or so there has been an attempt, I don't know that it will be successful but it doesn't look like it right now, of rebel forces to overthrow the government. There has been fighting in N'Djamena and our embassy has moved to the airport and we've taken a lot of Americans out. So there has been considerable reporting on Chad as they say. I saw one account saying that it was listed as being one of the most corrupt country and the next most corrupt was Bangladesh. Now I can't tell whether this is just media hyperbole or how was it viewed?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well that is a list I think put together by Transparency International every year or a group like that. Certainly there is corruption in the country; there is no question about that. I've talked enough with people and have enough friends in the business community to know that there is corruption. I don't think it's as bad as some of the neighboring countries - Nigeria or Cameroon - so there may be a little bit of an issue with methodology in terms of how these things are surveyed. But no one in their right mind would deny there is corruption.

Q: Was it sort of a given that you at the embassy and Exxon Mobil and all would try to do all they could to make sure that the money didn't go into Swiss bank accounts?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, and there was a very carefully constructed revenue management plan that was put together by the World Bank, insisted on and basically what it said was a certain small percentage of the money is going to go into a fund for future generations, another small percentage is going to go to develop the oil-producing region itself, and the lion's share of the proceeds revenues would be divided among four or five key development areas and support things like health, education, agriculture and the environment and this sort of thing.

The plan had a fundamental flaw to it. Oh and a certain amount, I think about twelve percent was provided to the government to support general government expenditure so that they could increase the budget and some of the other areas a little bit. But there was sort of a fundamental flaw in how this was put together. Four or five sectors where the money was supposed to flow had been identified through the World Banks work in preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy and selected that way. However, they were already the sectors into which all the other development funding coming into the country provided by the French, the Taiwanese, the European Union, the Germans, all of the other money was going into those same four sectors so you had an absorbency issue right from the get-go. The Chadians with some validity, about a year after the revenues began to flow which would have been just about the time I was leaving country, began to make noises about having the priority sectors broadened and reallocated. At a certain point they actually just took some of the revenue and used it for arms that they are using today to fight this rebellion.

So I would say that because of the revenue management plan, the scrutiny at the Bank, the IMF, ourselves, Europeans, more of the money has gone where it was supposed to go in Chad than is the case and a number of the other oil rich African countries Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Sudan, but certainly not all of it and the plan has not worked perfectly. I think right now, as we speak, it's up for renegotiation as how to get through negotiations every two or three years with the World Bank. Of course, the revenues that have come in because of the huge increase in oil prices have been much larger than what was estimated so this has compounded that problem of how much you can spend in those priority sectors. [FYA - At about the time of this interview, Chad, benefiting from very high oil prices, paid off the World Bank loan and essentially walked away from the Revenue Management Plan.]

Q: Was the president and in the first place how tribal was his government?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was, I would say, fairly heavily tribal. His own group is not one of the larger tribal groups, it is not one of the particularly well educated tribal groups in the country but it is allied or was allied with some other northern groups so that you had pretty good representation of northerners. The ruling party actually had made an effort to become a national party and so there were southerners that were in the party and there were southerners that were represented in the government as well. It was, in effect, the only party that by any stretch you could say was a national party in the country. But the president's own tribe, the Bidayat, and a larger related tribe, the Zaghawa, dominated the military pretty strongly. So key people in the government tend to come from his immediate family circle, and his immediate tribal group.

Q: You had an embassy, I assume political officers, economic and all. What can a political officer do in a place where it is pretty much one party?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well first of all for a long time we only had one reporting officer when I arrived. A very good person who actually, but who had a chip on her shoulder vis-à-vis the government because one of the things she did was report a lot on what the democratic opposition was doing, and got a lot of opinionated information from there. But the cables this individual wrote were of high quality even if I had to make them a little more neutral from time to time. But for most of the time after that person left that job was vacant. We didn't get bids on it, we eventually got somebody into it that was willing to take it but came out and couldn't master French and you can't really do that work without French. So that job was combined with the consular work. So the DCM and I ended up doing most of the political reporting for about the last two years that I was there. That, of course, was a bit of the handicap and I think we were actually criticized in an Inspector General's audit that took place just after I left post for not having done more reporting.

Q: Well what do you report?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well first of all, we reported a lot on the oil project and how it was going. We would report on the economic development efforts in the country. About every five or six months I'd make the round of all the democratic opposition leaders of whom there were four or five and I would report on what they were saying was happening. We did reports on some of the sort of social issues in the country and these kinds of things.

Q: Well you say democratic...

GOLDTHWAIT: Oh, also we reported the loss particularly after the coup in the CAR...

Q: That's the Central African Republic.

GOLDTHWAIT: Of which the Chadians were blamed for supporting if not fostering. We reported a lot on their relations with the CAR and whether they had or had not been involved in this. Occasionally, we reported on their relations with other neighboring countries Sudan, Libya and pretty much throughout the time I was there there was a kind of festering rebellion in the far northwestern corner of the country, the Tibesti Mountains. The first year I was there it was a bit more active and there were fears that they might come down to Faya-Largeau which is sort of the main town in the northern part of the country which they never did. But there was fighting and so we'd report on that.

Q: You mentioned your four or five democratic leaders...in the first place was this a term we used or were these say democrats or were they just people who were out of power waiting to get their hands in there?

GOLDTHWAIT: There were leaders, which tended to be of regional political parties, and they considered themselves to be democratic. So we tended to refer to them as the democratic opposition. They were the ones that were saying we want free and fair elections, we want monitors to come in and watch the elections, etc., etc. They contested the president's reelection right after, well about a year and a half after I got there. That was an interesting election because the president won with about sixty-five percent; it was by no means an impeccable election. His party stuffed a lot of ballots but I thought it was kind of sad because I had the very strong view that if he had run a fair election he still would have been elected. So I thought it was rather unfortunate that he took the steps he needed to take or he felt that he needed to take when he really didn't need to.

Q: Did you find yourself making representation to the president or the government on more democracy, on human rights? I mean was this an issue that we were active in?

GOLDTHWAIT: Certainly as we got toward the presidential election and there were also parliamentary elections certainly we would go in and make representations to the effect that we wanted there to be free and fair elections. Inevitably they would told, "Of course, of course, that's what we want too." But it clearly wasn't the case.

Q: What about on these issues what was the role of the French ambassador and his government?

GOLDTHWAIT: That was kind of interesting, a very interesting episode. The French ambassador who was there when I arrived represented...there were two factions in the French government that tended to argue back and forth about French African policy. The presidency on the one hand and the foreign ministry. They were in the same government but they were kind of...you could see a little squabble going on. The two sides, the two factions and I don't remember which took which side at this point but one was more inclined to support the Deby regime fairly strongly and the other was more critical of the Deby regime.

The ambassador from France when I arrived there was of the second view and he went so far as to give an interview to one of the opposition newspaper. The newspapers were the elements in Chad that were pretty free and had a pretty free press most of the time I was there but maybe less so now. But it operated except for major incidents it operated fairly freely. But I think in the interview where he sort of opined, "Well, it might not be such a bad thing after all if the rebels won. He was immediately declared persona non grata and he was out of the country in two days. A couple months later, the new ambassador arrived who took a much lower profile and a much more evenhanded view of the situation in the country. He was a true gentleman; we got along very, very well. He worked very hard to mend fences. Today there are problems in Chad; Sarkozy is supporting Deby very, very strongly.

Q: What about relations with the French military because in a way they were kind of the people you expected to go to if there was going to be a problem weren't they?

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes, as we did over this past weekend with the fighting in Chad. I had a military attaché at the embassy and he worked very hard not only to maintain his contacts with the Chadian military but also to be sure that he was in close consultation with the French and shared information back and forth. One of the things that we had going was the largest U.S. assistance effort when I got to Chad, was a demining effort. Going back through all the civil wars mines were used and the country is littered with mines everywhere. We were doing it actually more than the French in that area. That was sort of our little specialty.

Q: What was your impression of the central government? Was everything going through the president or was there a competent bureaucracy with whom you were dealing?

GOLDTHWAIT: Important questions always went through the president. The bureaucracy was not terribly, terribly competent. You had a few good people as ministers in different areas but first of all they had very few resources outside of health and education, which were big targets of the development community. The staff further down just were not that well trained and in many cases not well educated. I think it's better today because there's been a pretty intensive effort by the donor community to work on the quality for about the past ten years now.

Q: Did you find yourself playing agricultural attaché often, going out and looking at the agricultural side of things?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, because most of it was subsistence farming and subsistence herding, no. But I did make a point of traveling widely around the country. Since we were not big players in the donor community we didn't have a lot of leverage with the government other than on the oil project. We weren't nearly able to get the same kind of visibility that the donor countries could achieve. I did a couple of things through which I tried to compensate for that, one of which was traveling really everywhere in the country. I think I probably traveled, I've not sat down to try to estimate it but I bet it was twenty thousand miles overland on dirt roads in the four and a half years I was there.

One of the other things was we did in fact inaugurate an aid project in the oil region. I was able to get my colleagues back at USDA to use that section 416 program, something about 416 section wheat that I mentioned for a donation which we monetized, i.e., which we sold within Chad and released the money to try to snag development around the oil regions so you wouldn't have this plight from agriculture as you have had in many, many other countries. That project went rather well, in fact, the IFC came in after our funding was exhausted and we provided what six or eight million and they came in and provided another 3-4 million to keep it going after that. So that's made an impact.

Q: Was there a problem certainly in Nigeria and other places where so many people coming sort of out of the hinterlands and heading for the capital and building shanty towns and all. Did that happen there?

GOLDTHWAIT: To a degree. N'Djamena was home to somewhere between 800 thousand and a million people out of a population of 8 million or a little more so you have had that. They've had growth in two or three other towns like Moundou and Kelo as well which are south of N'Djamena and basically commercial trading towns. So we have had some of that but simply because the population is smaller and spread around in a rather large country geographically. It's three times the size of California with only eight and a half million people. So you haven't had quite the effect you've seen in some countries.

Q: Do we have anything like Peace Corp? Do we have Peace Corp there?

GOLDTHWAIT: When I got there we did not have Peace Corp. I mentioned that AID had closed about four years earlier; Peace Corp had pulled out about five years earlier or about a year before AID or maybe it is the other way around. I immediately started lobbying the Peace Corp to come back and they returned about a year before I left so I was able to see the first of the volunteers go through their six or seven month in-country training and actually get out to their villages. One of the very last trips I made in December 2003 was to go with the Peace Corp director and visit four or five of them in their villages and I guess we spent about three days doing that. I considered that my principal accomplishment during my time in country. However, in 2006, because instability was growing in the country the Peace Corp decided to pull out again so they are no longer there.

Q: What caused the instability?

GOLDTHWAIT: It was the decision by the president to...let me go back and start over. I mentioned that there was always at the time I was there a sort of a low-key rebellion in the far north. Sometimes worse but it pretty much petered out by the time I left. There were a number of reasons why it had died out. First of all, the Chadians I think were not as dissatisfied with their government as some of their neighbors were with their own governments. The oil project was coming along and everybody was looking forward to having a little bit better income because of that. But there was still this residual hope that either through a democratization within the ruling party or through the president leaving office at the end of two terms there might be a better chance at fairer elections. So I think for all those reasons things remained somewhat stable. But when the president decided that he wanted a third term a lot of that went out the window.

Q: What about, let's sort of do some of the boundaries. What about you mentioned the Central African Republic. During the time you were there what was Chad messing around with the Central African Republic or was it not?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well the situation that you have along pretty much all of the borders of Chad is that tribal groups spill over those borders; this is no surprise in Africa, which is the case in most countries in Africa. The tribal groups in the border areas often have more affinity with one another than they have with their ruling governments. Small incidents tend to spill over those borders. In other words, if you have an incident in Central African Republic and there was a coup d'état there, you may very well have people from the border tribes fleeing north into Chad and likewise the Darfur refugees began to come into Chad initially because their extended families were resident in Chad and could support them. This I think tends to make for rather sensitive relations along all the borders and small little incidents I think tend to become bigger incidents and certainly you have suspicions when the tribal groups around the borders are involved in conflict in the neighboring country.

Q: What about the Sudan? I mean Chad pretty well abuts on the Sudan above Sudan's north-south conflict doesn't it? In other words, they have a Christian south...it doesn't spill over into Chad does it or not?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, it really does not or at least until the Darfur situation it did not. During the time I was there the relations with Sudan were really pretty good. The presidents visited back and forth once or twice and on the whole their relations were not bad. The border areas along Sudan were peaceful; I was able to travel up and down that border on the Chadian side on one of my trips. I would say things were relatively calm; it was only when the refugees began to spill over from Darfur that that situation started to intensify. As the refugees spilled over some of the Sudanese groups, Janjaweed groups that were fighting tribal groups from where the refugees came they began to chase them into Chad and that's when the situation politically between the countries began to worsen. Chadians...

Q: Was this during your time?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Darfur situation began to be serious during the last year I was there. We had refugees coming into Chad but not to the degree that their extended families couldn't cope and you didn't yet have the Janjaweed and the other Sudanese groups coming into Chad and fighting Chadians. That began after I left.

Q: Well what about Libya?

GOLDTHWAIT: The relationship with Libya and Chad is a love-hate relationship. Actually President Deby got his start, if you will, as the general in charge of Chadian forces fighting the Libyans back in the mid-'80s when Libya occupied the northern quarter of Chad. He developed this famous tactic by which he drove the Libyans out of the country.

Q: These were the Toyota wars?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Toyota wars, yes. The Libyans had a very large military encampment called Wadi Doum and most of their occupation force was concentrated there and they didn't really attempt to control much of the countryside...

Q: This is Tape 4, Side 1, with Chris Goldthwait. Yeah?

GOLDTHWAIT: The Libyan soldiers were not terribly well trained or enthused about being in Chad. The Chadians at that point, had a certain sense of almost nationalism that was propelling them. After a bit of fighting around Fada and a few other areas the Libyans pretty much retreated into Wadi Doum and they had about 15,000 men there. The Chadians developed this tactic, or had developed this tactic, where they would drive the Toyotas that had machine guns mounted on top of the cabs, they were Toyota pickups, you know a dozen soldiers in the back and machine gun mounted on top; then the drivers can go very, very fast even through the desert. The Libyans would rely mainly on mine fields around the encampment to protect them. So they were not terribly, terribly vigilant. One day Deby got his troops and his Toyotas and drove over the minefields so fast that the mines exploded after the Toyotas were already passed, they went in and with machine guns they literally mowed down thousands and thousands of the Libyans. The Libyans then decided that they needed to negotiate an exit from Chad. That's how he got his start.

He had a good degree of popularity as a result of that and then later he threw out Hissï½ne Habre who was the president at the time all that was taking place. That would have been in the early '90s, about '91 or '92. He then followed the same route that these rebels took from Sudan the other day coming across the main communication routes and from the east.

Q: Well during the time you were there did Qadhafi pull in his horns pretty much?

GOLDTHWAIT: He would periodically lend support to the festering rebellion in northwestern Chad sometimes giving them more support, sometimes a little less support. At one point the Chadians discovered that there was a rebel camp 100 miles into Libya as the Libyans were allowing as a kind of safe haven and the Chadians went in and took it out. Qadhafi, I believe, decided not to play around quite so much after that.

But they have this love-hate relationship. Libya has traditionally given Chad a fair amount of aid including military aid on some occasions but at the same time the Chadians know better than to trust them.

Q: Did Nigeria being an English-speaking country...they had a north-south thing did that have any particular influence?

GOLDTHWAIT: Not a lot. I would say relations with Nigerians were pretty good. Nigeria had two responsible ambassadors during the time I was there and so their relations were probably about the best among the neighboring countries. Relations with Cameroon were not bad although occasionally there were tensions with the Cameroonians because pretty much everything Chad imports has to come up through Cameroon and if the trade gets bogged down the Chadians wonder if the Cameroon government is somehow putting obstacles in place.

Q: Did Chad feel itself part of a Francophone-African entity or was there such a thing at this point?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, Chad was, is, a member of what the French call La Francophonie, which is an international organization of French speaking countries including countries like Canada and Lebanon and Egypt where French today is a minority language. That organization actually had a meeting in Chad shortly before I left and the French spend big dollars to keep it going. So in that sense there was a feeling of an affinity with other African French speaking countries through that organization and I think particularly with Niger, which is very similar to Chad in many ways new, it also had a close affinity.

I should mention economically a number of these countries are members of the FCFA franc zone so their economic relations are very strong.

Q: I can't think of his first name but Francois Mitterrand's son who was very much Mr. Africa in the French government. At one point was he a figure at all?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, I don't really recall that he ever came to Chad while I was there and I don't recall very much about him.

Q: You didn't have diamonds in...?

GOLDTHWAIT: No.

Q: Diamonds and oil can really cause problems and I think diamonds are almost more pernicious. They are easily portable and easily corruptible.

GOLDTHWAIT: Yes. Oil you pretty much have to have a big company and a big installation. The problem with oil is where the money goes but none of us gets paid.

Q: Was there a feel that money was heading off to Swiss banks or did the president have villas on the Riviera and that sort of thing?

GOLDTHWAIT: He was certainly less ostentatious, he and his family than, a lot of other people. I'm reasonably certain however, though that they had managed to certainly put resources offshore, I believe he probably has an apartment in Paris as do many, many prominent Chadians. But one of the things that I always thought limited the corruption was simply that until the oil money started flowing there was just not much money. The big sources of revenue were the cotton monopoly and the sugar monopoly.

The sugar monopoly was privatized and the cotton monopoly was theoretically in the process of being privatized, I'm not sure that's ever happened however. The government really wanted to keep that so they would have one cash cow left.

Q: By the time you got there I guess you no longer had the USIA operation on public diplomacy. What were our people doing with public diplomacy as far as leader grants or English speaking reading library? I mean what were we up to?

GOLDTHWAIT: We had a fairly active English language program. We had a fairly active program of visitors representing American culture coming through, we had authors and speakers, even musicians coming through. The public diplomacy officers who were there tended to do a lot of outreach to the university and other cultural institutions in country. We even had public diplomacy training programs that went a little bit in the direction of democratization. For example, we had a program that supported the training of the staff of legislatures. So we actually helped the staff form an association and develop relationships with other such associations in other African countries. So we had a pretty active public diplomacy office and I would have to say that the individuals who came out, as our office heads were quite qualified.

Q: Who were they?

GOLDTHWAIT: One was Frank Huffman. He was actually doing a one-year TDY (temporary duty) and he was a senior Foreign Service officer. The other individual who was there most of the time I was there was Kay Moseley. She was an extremely out-going person making a second career in the State Department. So they were both very senior people in terms of their experience and they were highly qualified.

Q: Did you find that you were up against a certain amount of opposition from the French for trying to spread their culture?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, really not for a couple of reasons. First of all, the French culture was already much more dominate and I don't think they really felt that threatened by us. Secondly, there was a very strong interest on the part of the Chadians particularly in English language partly just as an alternative to the French but partly also because of the oil project which meant that it was becoming much more important to speak English.

Q: Did you find that this whole oil business was quite new in Chad and you know, oil people are oil people, I mean, sort of oil operators coming around and sniffing around doing whatever oil explorers and investors do. Was this a problem for you?

GOLDTHWAIT: No, it was not. In fact, I would say we had very, very few problems. The management of Exxon Mobile was very careful; the oilmen, if you will, lived in their own encampments in the middle of the oil zone. They had a curfew and they really didn't cause any real tensions between them and the local people. You had some disappointment because there weren't more jobs for Chadians right off the bat but over time there have been more jobs for Chadians. There was an expectation that you would have a much larger employment impact than the projects ever intended to have and that had to be managed a bit. But some of the positive influences came in related industries. There was a tremendous boom in the security industry, the oil project contracted with local enterprises for security and so you had three or four security firms which grew up overnight employing several thousand people between them. You had a similar growth in trucking to handle all the imports of the equipment up from Cameroon and you had Chadians benefiting from that. So you did have some in the construction industry, which took off to a limited degree because those people that did have some income from the oil project wanted better houses.

Q: How did you find sort of on the social side, how did you find the Chadians? Were they aloof, approachable, I mean, just getting to know them?

GOLDTHWAIT: I found them to be relatively warm. I never got too terribly close to them, at least because for me as an ambassador there was always a certain formality. Most of my colleagues in the embassy managed to develop what I would call real friendships. I guess I would say I have one real friendship with a Chadian which I didn't realize until I went back to country two months ago and seeing this gentleman who was one of the principal businessmen in Chad and going back and calling on him again really sort of cemented that friendship. So I guess I could say I have one now and it is much warmer now that I am no longer the sitting ambassador.

But the government people tended to be reserved but you could tell that there was a genuine appreciation of certain things that were done. One thing that we did sort of mid-way through my time there was launch a blood drive. One day there was an article on the front page of the daily newspaper which was somewhat under the government's thumb that said there was a great crisis in the hospital because the blood supply was down to about ten pints and all of those were reserved for specific family members who were patients in the hospital so there was virtually no blood for traffic accident victims who would be brought in on a stretcher. The health practitioner in the embassy came in and said to me later that day that he wanted to organize a blood drive among the embassy personnel and I said that's a great idea. Well we got it all organized within about three weeks working with the hospital and he had no reason to be so outgoing but again like the public diplomacy people this guy was a go-getter and he had gone out and gotten to know people at the local hospital and the other clinics around town and was very active. Well they imported the blood collection supplies from France and so about thirty of us trooped over to the hospital, which was pretty much right across the street from the embassy. So the next day in the paper on the front page of the paper there was my picture with blood implements in my arm giving blood. Of course, no Chadian minister would think of doing that sort of thing but that tiny thing made a real impression on a lot of people both average citizens and opinion leaders in the country.

The Grand Imam, whom at the suggestion of one of my colleagues in the embassy, I had begun to call on, long before 9/11, saw the picture, brought a delegation of his council to the embassy, paid a courtesy call on me to thank me for doing that for Chad. As a result of that, when I left country even though by that time we were involved in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq the Supreme Islamic Council presented me with an award thanking me for my work there in Chad. As he told me I was only one of three ambassadors that they had recognized this way in the twelve years that he had been in the position of supreme Imam in country. So that meant a great deal and it meant a lot to me and I think it showed the way in which we managed to get some outreach in unique ways.

Q: What about you're in a country which is majority Islamic and you have Osama bin Laden, the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York and all that. How did that play for you? For and after what was happening in Chad this fermenting Islamic clause?

GOLDTHEWAIT: There was not a lot of fundamentalist sentiment in my view of the Islamic community in Chad. The Grand Imam, although he is a former general, took a very moderate approach, he very much wanted Islam in Chad to be a religion of peace and he didn't want particularly any strife between religious groups, Christians, Moslems and he didn't want strife among various groups within the Islamic community. When he saw a danger that something might happen in that direction he did his best to defuse it or stomp on it. I think he succeeded.

When 9/11 took place as in so many parts of the world there was this enormous outpouring of sympathy for us. We, of course, had a condolence book; we had pretty much everyone in the government and most of the other people that we had as contacts around the city and all of those opposition leaders and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of ordinary Chadian citizens come to sign that book. So there was this immediate and enormous sympathy. Later, of course, we began to take action in Afghanistan but that went down fairly well, there was no real problem. Then after that, of course, when the Iraqi invasion came in it was pretty clear to me that from the get-go they had already determined that they wanted to invade Iraq and get rid of Saddam Hussein. I thought that was...I was opposed to that personally from the very beginning and one of the difficult things that I had to do was come up with a rationale that I could present publicly that I thought would pass the laugh test and that I could present privately to the government as to why we were doing this. Basically I threw away the talking points that came out from the Department and came up with my own. The thing I finally determined that I would say that might justify our action was that Saddam Hussein was the one sitting ruler in the world who had used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. That rather than the various fears about what weapons of mass destruction he might still have was what I presented as justifying our action even though personally I was opposed to it. I almost wrote and sent a dissent cable and talked to my people back in the Department who said, "You know ambassador's don't really do that sort of thing so you probably really shouldn't." So I not knowing the State Department as intimately as I might have liked I took their advice on that.

But the interesting thing was the government's reaction when I went in and told the foreign minister this is what we were doing and why. He wasn't really concerned. He said, "Well you know Iraq's a long way from here and we have our own problems." Reading both his words and his body language what I took away was that this government, which had taken power by military force itself, was taking a kind of an oblique pleasure in seeing the greatest democracy in the world resort to military action itself in our opposition to a sitting dictator. I thought to myself well if I needed another reason to show why this was the wrong thing to do the way in which they are reacting to this... The Chadian government saw it as a kind of back handed legitimization of their own use of force to gain power.

Q: We have lost an awful lot of morale high ground, I think. Were you picking up from other ambassadors and also from the Chadian government and their ties to France sort of a dislike or almost contempt of George Bush, Jr.?

GOLDTHWAIT: Certainly not from the Chadian government, they didn't know him well enough to have a strong dislike of contempt. As I say, the resort to military action didn't have a negative impact on them per se. Nor what I think some of the constraints that I think this administration has put on our own domestic civil liberties, that wouldn't bother them. The opposition groups were perhaps disappointed. I think there were little signs that I would read from them that they thought we had moved somewhat away from being a sort of beacon that we might have been to them at one time. If anything, that pushed them back a little bit closer to the French who in many ways had strong ties to... the government had ties to the French, but different people within France on the part of the opposition. But they felt perhaps pushed a little bit more back to those traditional relationships.

Q: Was there any particular...was Chad just too far removed and not sophisticated enough to have the equivalent to the intellectuals of France and the chattering class there?

GOLDTHWAIT: You had a very small chattering class and they tended to be the ones that opposed the oil project, they tended to be well-educated southerners who had done their university work in France. It was a pretty small group. They ran to the opposition newspapers basically of which there were five or six and they were weekly's they were not daily's. They were university professors, a few people like that and privately I got to know one gentleman who was a medical professor at the university. The University of N'djamena graduated its first class of about a dozen doctors while I was there and he was one of the instructors and I played tennis with him a couple of times a week. We had a doubles game that we played. He didn't hide his criticism of the government at all when we were just out there on the tennis court.

Q: Had the Saudi's made any effort to create Madrassas or the fundamentalist's schools in Chad?

GOLDTHWAIT: They were financing the construction of a lot of mosques around the country. I don't believe they were actually creating Madrassas although we were becoming a little concerned by the time I left that maybe there would be some activity in this direction.

Q: You were there five and a half years.

GOLDTHWAIT: Four and a half.

Q: Four and a half years. This is a long time over four years and through a change of administration. How do you describe this?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well it was not my own fault. It was accidental you would say. It was because of a mistake I think someone else made. A normal tour of an ambassador is three years. I was getting close to the end of my third year and I was back here in Washington for consultations and the person who had been selected, not yet formally nominated to replace me, later in that year which was probably April of '03, not April of '02. In fact he invited me for dinner with him and his wife at their house in DC. We had a nice dinner and he dropped me back at the hotel. Also at the dinner was the woman who was going to be coming out to replace Paul Rowe the DCM (deputy chief of mission) Casey Casebeer. He brought me back to the hotel seconds after dropping her off where she was staying and the last thing he said to me as I was getting out of the car was, "Oh yeah, I'll just mention I'm having this little heart operation next week but I'm sure I'll be fine by August when I get out here." I thought to myself heart operation, Chad, not a single cardiologist in the country, is this gentleman really coming? I began mentally to prepare myself to stay on longer. I was thinking of longer in terms of a few months in terms until another candidate was located. He didn't tell anybody that he was going to have this operation and he went in for his physical examination in July I guess just before getting his medical clearance. By that time, the annual process for career ambassadorships was so far along that there was no one available to be a ready successor. I kept watching to see if his nomination had been released and it was not and it was not and it was not. It was not until October and I made one or two calls back to ask, "Well gee are things still on track?" I was just told, "Well, there's been a delay here." Finally in October I got a call it was from Don Yamamoto who was the P DAS at that point in the department asking if I could be thought to stay on for an additional year because the person was unable to come due to this heart condition that he hadn't told anybody about. So I said, "Fine, I'm willing to stay an additional year." I was enjoying myself in the job and so I think I probably set a record for the longest serving U.S. ambassador in Chad.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover in Chad?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well let's see let me look at my little notes here. Oh, just a couple of things, two, three things quickly. I was rather pleased at the way in which I thought I was able to, and others in the embassy were able to, balance the relations between keeping cordial relations with the government on one hand and maintaining our contacts on a regular basis with the opposition leaders on the other. I was told at one point that the Chadian ambassador in Washington had actually complained to the Department about my visits with opposition people but I kept them up and I think they were eventually accepted, as something an ambassador from the United States simply had to do.

I mentioned my effort in returning the Peace Corps and one thing I was able to do was about triple the level of U.S. assistance to Chad from between \$3-4 million a year up to, it peaked up to \$11 million in 2003. That came from a variety of sources not really any from AID but from food aid from my old colleagues in USDA and some other programs we were able to tap into and a little bit of ESF funding that we finally got the Department to allocate. One of the things that I was very pleased with was the founding in my last year of a U.S.-Chadian business association. I found when I went back to Chad two months ago that it was still flourishing. So unlike the Peace Corps that was going to be a permanent accomplishment, at least I hope so.

I think those were the other things that I mentioned that I think are perhaps interesting.

Q: You alluded to it a bit on the reporting. Did you have a problem...you get relative junior officers coming in to a place where you've got a dictatorship or pretty damn close to a dictatorship and you've got corruption and all and this, of course, is strong meat for young reporting officers to get out there and turn up, look under loose stones and all that. Were you finding any problem reigning in your junior officers?

GOLDTHWAIT: The person who was the political/econ/consular officer when I first got to post was in that mode even though that person was, I think, maybe even third tour by that time, certainly second but possibly third. But none of the other officers that were the young go-getters that you mentioned were in that section except for one who came out as combination consular officer and economic officer. His focus was fairly more on the commercial aspect of things, not so much the politics. So he didn't really get into that mode. A couple of the diplomacy people that we had come out were more senior; we didn't have a number of new to the service officers the last year I was there. I'm trying to remember where they all served. I had three or four of them because the second DCM, Casey, started a kind of a series of training sessions for them...oh, they were mostly in the admin area and then I guess the commercial officer. So two or three of them worked within the admin area. Our admin staff grew fairly sharply because the embassy needed a lot of work, it was in really bad shape as a physical plant.

Q: OK, well then you left there when?

GOLDTHWAIT: In January of 2004. I went back to my home agency, the Foreign Agricultural Service for about six months. I had been on a limited career extension at USDA before going to Chad, which was granted on the premise that everybody knew I was going to be heading off to Chad. They were kind enough to give me the time that was left on it, that had been left on it when I had departed Chad when I got back so I had six months to kind of get my feet back on the ground in Washington. I did a variety of things. I was the special assistant to the administrator. I worked a little bit on helping the USDA coordinate USDA's activities in Iraq, which were largely developmentally oriented and trade oriented. Then I wrote a paper, came up with some ideas, on how some of the credit programs that I had at one time administered could be brought more into conformance to WTO rules and a couple of things like that.

Then I left the government service in October of 2004.

Q: What have you been doing since?

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, I applied for a couple...I took the job search program in August or September of '04. I did apply to a couple of full time jobs. In fact, I had an offer to become the African activities director for one of the development agencies here in town which eventually got taken off the table because the president got fired, who had made the offer to me, got fired right before it. But I just sort of fell into consulting work working for a variety of people that I had worked with before going to Chad including my undersecretary during the current administration, Gus Schumacher, and that started as kind of a half time assignment working for one client that he had been doing some work for. Then that and other things it's just become pretty much full time.

I sort of enjoy the flexibility of being able to work a 40-hour week rather than a 50-hour week and being able to set my own hours sometimes. What I find is that the work will be a 50-hour week during peak periods but then there are other periods when for two or three weeks it will be a 30-hour week and I will have extra time. I also like very much to do the variety of things that I've been doing.

I've been working a lot on food aid programs, working with several private voluntary organizations. This client that I mentioned where I do most of my, about half my time, it will take food aid allocations that are given to private voluntary organizations and undertake the commercial activity of monetizing the food aid for them. So I've been doing a lot of work on that score. I did a job for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. They organized a farm bill task force looking at recommendations for the farm bill that hopefully is about to be enacted and they got together about thirty agricultural policy leaders from around the country and we came up, and I was the principal author of the book that accepted their recommendations which was about 100-page little volume. We went up and briefed members on the Hill and gave them our recommendations. So that was one thing that was very enjoyable although very hectic trying to draw a sensitive position with thirty different people that are leaders in their field was a struggle.

Most recently one of the things I've done for one of the private voluntary organizations was leading a strategic planning exercise. Doing a facilitated retreat and producing the results in the form of a ready strategic plan. I finished that this morning. So I've done a number of things that are quite interesting and this is keeping me active.

Q: All right, well I want to thank you very much.

GOLDTHWAIT: Well, I'm delighted to do this.

End of interview